VOICES IN THE WILDERNESS

Six American Neo-Romantic Composers

WALTER SIMMONS

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This book is dedicated
to the memory of my parents,
Irving and Dorothy Simmons.

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Introduction

Conventional accounts of the history of American concert music throughout most of the twentieth century typically begin with Charles Ives—his rebellion against the timid Eurocentric epigones who comprised his teachers and their peers, his American Transcendentalism, and his anticipation of innovations later adopted by the European avant-garde. This is often followed by a discussion of the development of jazz and the appeal it held for European sophisticates during the 1920s, as well as for American composers like George Gershwin and others, who sought ways of incorporating its spontaneity, its rhythmic vitality, and its unmistakable "Americanness" into traditional "classical" forms. The quest for an independent national musical identity might then be juxtaposed against the "crisis of tonality" said to beset European music around the time of the First World War. Tonality refers to the tendency of conventional music to gravitate toward a particular home note, or "tonic." But more than just a musical center of gravity, tonality was developed by the Austro-Germanic classical masters into the fundamental organizing principle of large-scale works. Symphonies, sonatas, and string quartets were structured according to relationships among subordinate tonal regions to a primary tonal center, all of which were presumably audible and comprehensible to the listener. Around the turn of the twentieth century, Arnold Schoenberg and others asserted that Richard Wagner and his followers (including

Schoenberg himself) had exhausted this system upon which music had been predicated for centuries.

This alleged "crisis" led composers to explore a variety of radical new paths: Igor Stravinsky liberated dissonance from its historical role as an expression of harmonic tension requiring resolution. Instead, dissonance was exalted as a legitimate, independent class of harmonic sonority in its own right. The element of rhythm also assumed greater importance, equivalent to harmony and melody rather than subordinate to them. Some composers, like the Hungarian Bela Bartók, turned to their own indigenous folk melodies to revitalize their music and infuse it with an authentic—rather than refined and romanticized—national flavor. These new directions were part of an avant-garde movement that contributed to the development of "Modernism," an aesthetic perspective that influenced all the arts during and after World War I in reaction to the alleged extravagance of Romanticism in its later manifestations.

The Modernist position in music held that the emphasis placed on subjective experience by the Romantics—especially, the grandiose distortions and exaggerations that resulted from excessive self-absorption—had become narcissistic and self-indulgent. New areas of cultural inquiry appeared—areas that turned attention outward toward social and political issues and toward developments in science and technology that promised to take on increased importance in the years to follow. In order to reflect these trends, entirely new forms of musical expression were said to be needed.

Around 1920 Schoenberg devised an alternative to the organizing principle of tonality, proposing a means of systematizing the *absence* of tonality. His concept became known as "twelve-tone composition," later developed into a more comprehensive approach known as "serialism." The serialists argued that abandoning the system of tonality required dispensing with classical forms as well, as these were felt to be inseparable from the principle of tonality as a unifying force. Therefore, new forms were needed, specifically tailored to the premises of serial composition.

Although Schoenberg saw in twelve-tone composition a means of perpetuating the supremacy of the Austro-Germanic musical aesthetic, many of its proponents promoted their system as "international," scorning the provinciality of more nationalistic approaches. A number of American composers, such as Wallingford Riegger and Roger Sessions, were attracted to the twelve-tone approach as a

means of dispelling the impression of provincialism and of distinguishing themselves from those who were embracing vernacular elements in their music.

Other innovative approaches to musical composition that arose as alternatives to traditional tonality and flourished in the United States during the middle decades of the twentieth century included indeterminacy, microtonality, and the use of electronic sound sources. The proponents of these new approaches to composition were often at odds with each other, many of their tenets being essentially mutually exclusive. But all were in fundamental agreement that tonality was no longer a viable principle in the creation of music as a serious art form. The American music-loving public, however, never accepted the music composed in the wake of the tonal system. In fact, many of those composers, roughly contemporary with Schoenberg, who did not embrace his notions of an exhausted tonal system—Ravel, Puccini, Richard Strauss, and Rachmaninoff, for example—achieved tremendous popular success. (For more elaborate discussions and analyses of these developments and those that follow, see Nicholas Tawa's *Serenading the Reluctant Eagle* [1984], *A Most Wondrous Babble* [1987], and *American Composers and Their Public* [1995].)

During the 1930s, the period of the Great Depression, another nationalist trend emerged in America, this time under the guise of populism, influenced to some extent by the Soviet aesthetic known as "socialist realism," which extolled the virtues of art for the masses and regarded avant-garde intellectual innovations as "elitist." This populist trend attracted many composers who were sympathetic to socialist ideology, as well as others who were simply unwilling to limit their work to a small esoteric audience. During this decade and the next, an American symphonic school of composition emerged. Most of the composers who participated in this movement—Aaron Copland, Roy Harris, Morton Gould, Elie Siegmeister, and others—were eager to find an appreciative audience for their work and attempted to evoke a sense of the "American character" or the "American experience" in a way that would be discernible to the untrained listener. Many incorporated explicitly American vernacular elements in their work. Other composers, among them Howard Hanson, Samuel Barber, Vittorio Giannini, and Paul Creston, were more interested in adding their voices to the traditional classical music heritage than in creating a distinctly

American "sound." These composers too enjoyed a period of attention, as well as popular and critical favor. Some—Copland and Barber, for example—developed prominent reputations that outlasted the brief period when this trend was in vogue.

However, by the mid-1950s the Modernist aesthetic, led by the European serialist movement, had begun to establish influential power bases in the music departments of Princeton and other major American universities, where composers were freed from the responsibility of having to win acceptance for their creative fruits in the marketplace of music lovers. Touting its "internationalism," this approach, as articulated by provocative, outspoken European advocates like Pierre Boulez and Karlheinz Stockhausen and by Americans like Milton Babbitt, successfully preempted the American symphonic school. (Boulez had written in 1952, "I . . . assert that any musician who has not experienced . . . the necessity for the dodecaphonic [i.e., twelve-tone] language is USELESS. For his whole work is irrelevant to the needs of his epoch."[1]) With an abundance of theoretical writing to elaborate its principles and support its claim of providing a comparable alternative to the organizing power of tonality, serialism lent itself to the academic propensity for abstract rationalization, aligning itself with subjects like mathematics, linguistics, and philosophy. Conservatories, the traditional centers for musical study and less eager to embrace this point of view, were disparaged by spokesmen for the avant-garde as trade schools for the training of musical artisans. Scholars who embraced the Modernist view of musical history propagated it in their teaching and writing, and, by suppressing or discrediting alternative interpretations, succeeded in achieving intellectual hegemony. Composers like Elliott Carter and even Copland, who had embraced the nationalist-populist aesthetic during the 1940s, turned to serialism in the 1950s.

The Modernist elite defended their work against rejection by the general public by responding with an attitude of contempt, to the point where a work's success with the public became sufficient evidence of its inferiority; by extension, music that embraced the qualities valued by listeners was denounced as pandering for acceptance. Conductors and instrumentalists, intimidated by the impression of intellectual weight and authority exerted by this point of view, began to avoid repertoire that might mark them as "out of step with the times." "The dogmas of modernism," writes Tawa, "outlawed

any music that entertained or proved easy for listeners to assimilate. An unforgiving breed was occupying important university positions, serving on the boards of foundations, advising the people who handed out grants and commissions and made performances possible. Those without a power base dared not cross them."[2] These attitudes filtered down to journalist-critics, who expressed them in the press, fostering a division in the public between those who prided themselves on their sophistication and disparaged new music that lacked "originality" and those who defiantly rejected "modern music" altogether. (*Time* called Copland "too popular to be a great composer."[3]) In an article in the *New York Times*, Anthony Tommasini recalled the "fractious decades after World War II," describing how university composers "seized the intellectual high ground and bullied their colleagues and students into accepting serial procedures as the only valid form of modernism. All those fusty holdouts still clinging to tonality were laughably irrelevant, the serialists argued. And if beleaguered audiences and even many critics recoiled from 12-tone music, well, . . . that was their problem."[4] Describing the critical response to new music in the 1950s and 1960s, Tawa writes:

> Anything that sported a triad or a lyric melody, that sounded beautiful in the customary sense of the word, or that evoked strong personal emotion was censured as old hat, clichéd, uninspired, unoriginal, and having nothing new to say. . . . If writers felt free to criticize prominent traditionalists . . . they had a field day with less known composers of the same persuasion. . . . Fledgling composers of such inclination were knocked down repeatedly as they took their first steps. Music lovers were discouraged from listening to their works, and performers feared to schedule anything that might win them bad publicity.[5]

The contemptuous attitude of Modernist composers was crystallized in a notorious article, published with the title "Who Cares If You Listen?" by the serial composer Milton Babbitt.[6] The result of force-feeding nontraditional musical styles to a public that became increasingly uncertain of its own reactions and insecure in its own tastes was a gradual estrangement of the audience from the music of its own time.

The piece of the truth that was suppressed during this aesthetic fiat was that there continued to be many American composers for

whom the crisis of tonality never existed and who were not concerned with either the development of a distinctly American musical style or with the other issues that concerned the Modernists. Few of the conventional accounts of American musical history have included these figures, except in the lists of miscellaneous "others" typically found at the ends of chapters. Usually such composers have been dismissed as shallow, inept, unimportant hangers-on, journeymen of limited talent or intelligence, panderers to commercial interests, or guilty of some other deficiency of character or artistry. By 1979, serialist composer Charles Wuorinen conceded patronizingly, "the tonal system, in an atrophied or vestigial form, is still used today in popular and commercial music, and even occasionally in the works of backward-looking serious composers," adding, "it is no longer employed by serious composers of the mainstream," having "been replaced or succeeded by the 12-tone system."[7]

This disparagement and suppression of tonal music amounted to a *de facto* blacklisting of composers who failed to conform to the approved version of music history. The most celebrated figures, such as Aaron Copland and Samuel Barber, had admittedly enjoyed sufficient public exposure and popular success to ensure their works a foothold in the repertoire durable enough to withstand critical condescension. And others—Walter Piston, William Schuman, Vincent Persichetti, and Peter Mennin, for example—who had achieved substantial reputations as a result of their positions on college or conservatory faculties were accorded the nominal respect typically associated with such positions. But even the works of these figures, not to mention those with less prominent reputations, were simply disregarded, their contributions denigrated and relegated to the periphery of the musical arena.[8]

Twentieth-Century Traditionalists challenges the Modernist interpretation of musical history, along with many of the assumptions on which it is predicated. For example, we reject the view that the fundamental significance of tonality is its function as a macrostructural organizing principle, insisting instead that this view of tonality applies chiefly to the Austro-Germanic line of musical evolution and the aesthetics that developed alongside it, but that it does not apply to the styles of music that developed in Italy, France, England, the Slavic countries, or—to focus on the subject of this book—in the United States, except insofar as composers in these countries chose

to adopt the Austro-Germanic aesthetic. We reject the assumption that the evolution of the tonal system proceeded according to a linear progression that led inevitably to the dissolution of tonality altogether. More broadly, we reject the view that music is fruitfully studied as *any* sort of linear progression, with some hypothetical goal toward which all contenders are racing, the prize going to the one who gets there first.

By the late 1970s, Modernist attitudes had begun to lose ground. Discouraged by the unwavering hostility and indifference of audiences to their works, an increasing number of composers—George Rochberg, Jacob Druckman, David Del Tredici among the most prominent—erstwhile proponents of atonality in its myriad guises, were beginning to question the linear musico-historical imperative that had served as their aesthetic premise. Many also addressed some of the consequences and hidden psychosocial agendas of the avant-garde and its public posture and began to seek ways of achieving a rapprochement with audiences by accommodating their creative work to the perceptual frameworks of the general listener. Meanwhile, composers like Philip Glass and Steve Reich had been developing a defiantly tonal, if not simplistic, approach that became known as "minimalism." A radical repudiation of the intellectual complexity of serialism, minimalism aroused an astonishingly enthusiastic response from audiences. However, most of the composers who had maintained their commitment to traditional tonality all along were now largely forgotten. While the music of a figure as prominent as Samuel Barber was soon heard widely again, he was identified more as an anachronism than as the most prominent example of a significant aesthetic alternative.

Since the late 1980s, however, a number of performers and commentators have begun to reconsider the composers who have been languishing in the footnotes of mainstream textbooks. Many dismissive judgments made decades ago are being questioned. It is this revival of interest that has made a serious survey of traditionalist composers both timely and necessary.

Twentieth-Century Traditionalists argues that the marginalization of these "alternative" figures deprived the listening public of an important and rewarding repertoire. This series asserts that the value of music lies in the myriad temperaments, personalities, perceptions, and perspectives on life-and-the-cosmos reflected in it; that the most interesting composers are those whose music reveals

the most rewarding perspectives, and does so through the means that convey them most effectively and convincingly. Furthermore, it holds that the compositional languages adopted by the traditionalists of the twentieth-century allowed for a richer, subtler, more varied range of musical expression than ever before in history. That is, the renunciation of tonality as a fundamental structural principle—without its being replaced by an arbitrary system like serialism—freed tonality to function within itself as an expressive parameter of the greatest nuance, in conjunction with other parameters like melody, rhythm, tone color, and so on.

Twentieth-Century Traditionalists argues and demonstrates that the most distinguished traditionalist composers created substantial bodies of work notable for their richness, variety, accessibility, and expressive power; that their music revealed distinctive individual features, recognizable stylistic traits, consistent themes and attitudes, as did the acknowledged masterpieces of the past; that much of this music had—and still has—the ability to bridge the gap between composer and audience, to enrich a musical repertoire that has become stagnant with the endless repetition of the tried and true, and to engage the enthusiasm of those seeking the adventure of discovering new creative personalities and their masterpieces, rather than merely the reassurance and soporific comfort of the overly familiar. It is to bring the most rewarding of these voices to greater awareness by the musical public that these studies are written.

A common reaction to the courses and lectures that have led to the writing of these studies has been the bewildering question: How can music as appealing and rewarding as this have been ignored for so long? Or: How could a composer with so much creative vision and expressive breadth be so little known? Some of the reasons are discussed in this introduction; other, more individual, reasons are presented in the chapters that follow. But, ultimately, there is no *adequate* answer, just as there is no *adequate* answer to the question: If the American Declaration of Independence states, "All men are created equal," then how could the institution of slavery have flourished? It is our hope that this study and others that follow will begin to increase awareness of this repertoire among scholars and performers, as well as general listeners.

Twentieth-Century Traditionalists offers a serious examination of those composers who created significant, artistically meaningful

bodies of work without abandoning traditional principles, forms, and procedures. Rather than dwelling on polemical diatribes concerning aesthetic abstractions, this series will highlight the most significant compositional figures, discussing their importance through biographical overviews and comprehensive critical assessments of their outputs, including both strengths and weaknesses, and identifying their most important and representative compositions, their distinguishing stylistic features, and their identities within the broader sociomusical context.

The term "traditionalists" is used in this work to refer to those composers for whom the dynamic force of tonality was an indispensable parameter of musical expression. Concerned more with their own individual expressive purposes than with novel compositional procedures, they preferred for the most part to work with the materials, forms, and techniques inherited from previous generations. Some continued along the stylistic lines of nineteenth-century European music; some followed the lead of Igor Stravinsky, who himself attempted to find an alternative to the grandiloquence of Late Romanticism without renouncing tonality and other traditional techniques; still others attempted in a variety of ways to "Americanize" the European musical tradition in order to give it greater meaning and relevance for the domestic public.

The first volume of *Twentieth-Century Traditionalists* is called *Voices in the Wilderness: Six American Neo-Romantic Composers*. Further studies in the series are currently in the planning stages. Projected volumes will focus on: American Neo-Classicists, American Opera Composers, American Nationalists and Populists, Three Traditionalists of the Juilliard School, and American Traditionalists—the Post-1930 Generation.

THE AMERICAN NEO-ROMANTICS

Voices in the Wilderness focuses on a group of composers born between the years 1880 and 1930 whose work is primarily concerned with the evocation of mood, the depiction of drama—either abstract or referential—and the expression of emotion—personal, subjective emotion, in particular. Embracing many of the stylistic features of late nineteenth-century music, the Neo-Romantics may be viewed as the most conservative of the traditionalists. In fact, the very term

"Neo-Romantic" is less than ideal, as the prefix "neo" implies a revival—by means of novel approach or reinterpretation—of a stylistic concept from the past. But the earlier Neo-Romantics were not reviving a style from the past—they were evolving along a continuum still very much alive. The composers who served as their chief sources of influence and points of departure were Richard Strauss, Puccini, Rachmaninoff, Sibelius, Debussy, and Ravel, most of whom are generally called "Late Romantics." It is worth noting that all of them were still alive and active when composers like Ernest Bloch and Howard Hanson began composing. And the younger Neo-Romantics viewed these same Europeans as their immediate antecedents. However, attempting to assign another, perhaps more precise, label to these composers seems unnecessarily fussy and potentially confusing; furthermore, accurately or not, the better-known figures, such as Hanson and Barber, have been identified by critics and commentators as "Neo-Romantic" for many years. So—notwithstanding all due misgivings and disclaimers—that term is used here.

The question arises as to whether there have been composers in other countries who might be characterized as "Neo-Romantic," as the term is applied here. For reasons too diverse and far afield to discuss in this study, the term has rarely been applied to composers from Europe and elsewhere whose music corresponds stylistically to that discussed here. Russians like Prokofiev, Miaskovsky, and Shostakovich; Englishmen like Vaughan Williams, Arnold Bax, Gerald Finzi, and William Walton; Honegger in Switzerland; Villa-Lobos in Brazil; Joly Braga Santos in Portugal; Henry Barraud in France; Kurt Atterberg, Gösta Nystroem, and Ture Rangström in Sweden; and the Slovak Eugen Suchon are just a few of the composers from countries other than the United States whose music displays the qualities associated with the American Neo-Romantics. Of course, the musical politics of these countries have their own histories, which influence and complicate the issue. Nevertheless it is a curiosity of musico-national stylistic nomenclature worth noting.

Perhaps more than any other group among the American Traditionalists, the Neo-Romantics have borne a stigma of disrepute. Few would dispute the claim that the general listening public is most readily drawn to music with the qualities associated with the Romantic aesthetic. However, an implied assumption underlying much critical and musicological commentary suggests that a direct

appeal to the emotions represents a lower form of artistic expression, as if accessibility somehow diminished the magnitude of a work's aesthetic achievement. Such an attitude plagued the reputations of composers like Tchaikovsky, Puccini, Strauss, and Rachmaninoff for years; indeed, it is only since the last decades of the twentieth century that the critical community has acknowledged their greatness without significant reservations. Compounding the problem for the American Neo-Romantics are the additional stigmas of being Americans in a field still considered to belong chiefly to Europeans and of continuing to embrace a style whose time has allegedly passed. In 1978, when an interviewer wondered whether Howard Hanson's "Romantic" Symphony perhaps appealed to a lower order of listener, the composer commented, "That's what the intellectual would like to have you think . . . [but] I get letters to this day from those who are not morons saying that their favorites are the Fourth Brahms and [my] Romantic Symphony."[9] And as recently as 2002, *New York Times* critic Anne Midgette capped off a begrudging acknowledgment of the effectiveness of a Neo-Romantic opera by Thomas Pasatieri with the remarkably revealing statement: "'The Seagull' seems to be a solid work at the lower end of the artistic spectrum, like a piece of furniture from Ikea [a low-priced, mass-market furniture retailer]: secretly better than it's supposed to be."[10]

There may be some truth to the assertion that composers whose music appeals directly to the emotions may be less concerned with matters typically viewed as "intellectual," such as formal coherence and structural complexity. However, one may legitimately question why an appeal to the intellect necessarily represents an order of artistic experience superior to an appeal to the emotions (except insofar as it satisfies humanity's vain quest to elevate itself above the animal kingdom). But one may further question whether an appeal to the emotions *must* somehow compromise legitimate formal and structural values. This study posits a Neo-Romantic ideal, in which the expression of emotion, depiction of drama, and evocation of mood are joined with, rather than opposed to, formal coherence, developmental rigor, and structural economy. Instead of representing mutually exclusive polarities, these two aesthetic objectives can complement each other in producing a heightened, intensified artistic experience. It is this ideal toward which the greatest Neo-Romantic composers have striven, and that they have, at times, achieved.

As indicated, the stylistic antecedents of the American Neo-

Romantics were European Late Romantics with whom they felt a strong affinity, either because of a shared cultural heritage or for reasons of a more individual nature. Like them the American Neo-Romantics tended to emphasize intense, passionate emotional expression, lavishly colored instrumental sonorities, and a rich, chromatic harmonic language derived from expanded triadic harmony. The American Late Romantics on the other hand—MacDowell, Chadwick, Hadley, Strong, Beach, et al.—were more conservative than their European counterparts, modeling their styles on composers like Dvorák, Brahms, Grieg, and Liszt. Their influence on later Americans was negligible, except perhaps on Hanson, to some extent.

Though the Neo-Romantics may have been unapologetically conservative, there are some points that distinguish them as a group from their European predecessors. For one, despite the primacy of spontaneous expression over abstract formal concision associated with Romanticism, most of the American Neo-Romantics displayed a greater use—and a more economical and disciplined application—of classical forms and more modest durational proportions in general than their European models. Second, though not as obviously and flagrantly as the American composers thought of as "Nationalists," the Neo-Romantics display certain characteristics often identified as "American," chiefly a heightened importance of rhythmic drive—frequently irregular, asymmetrical, and syncopated—and associated with this—a greater and more varied use of percussion instruments. Third, especially as they approached mid-century, the Neo-Romantics expanded the harmonic language of their predecessors by raising the "dissonance quotient," so to speak, usually by emphasizing such upper tertian additions as major-sevenths, dominant-ninths, augmented-ninths, augmented-elevenths, and others. Depending on spacing, or "voicing," and instrumentation, these expansions added richness, harshness, or both, thereby expanding the expressive potential of the harmonic language.

There is a fourth point that requires a more elaborate explanation. The American Neo-Romantics approached the matter of tonality somewhat differently from most of their European predecessors. In the earlier music of the Neo-Romantics, a tonal center is usually apparent at any given moment, although such centers may shift frequently within a work or section of a work, without a primary tonic exerting a unifying or hierarchical function relative to subordinate

tonal regions. In other words, rather than an overall organizing principle as in much European music, tonality functions in Neo-Romantic music as a local expressive device, its relative strength or weakness contributing to a sense of emotional stability or lack thereof in the work at hand. Furthermore, in later Neo-Romantic compositions, a subjective perception of tonality may be absent altogether for greater or lesser periods of time, allowing for the expression of more extreme emotional contrasts. But even during passages when a tonal center is largely imperceptible, subjectively experienced tensions rooted in tonal expectations serve as important expressive elements.

The term "tonal" requires further clarification, as a lack of unanimity in its usage has led to considerable confusion. The "strict constructionist" uses the term "tonal" to describe music composed according to the paradigms that developed chiefly in eighteenth-century Austria and Germany and dominated the music of those countries until the turn of the twentieth century. In this music, a primary tonal center serves as an overall organizing principle, unifying all other, subordinate aspects of a composition. The "loose constructionist" uses the term tonal to describe all music in which tension/resolution expectations rooted in tonal harmony play a role in the expressive impact of a composition. The confusion to which this lack of unanimity has given rise has been further complicated by the advent of additional terms—atonal, nontonal, pantonal, pandiatonic, twelve-tone, serial, et al.—in efforts to provide clarification, but these have in some cases perpetuated the confusion. In adopting the loose construction of the concept of tonality, this book acknowledges the use of "atonality" as an expressive device within a tonal composition, in passages where the subjective experience of a tonal center is largely absent, even though a theoretical tonic may be adduced through elaborate objective analysis.

There is one more issue that often arises in discussions of Neo-Romantic music that should be addressed at the outset. Many listeners, hearing this music for the first time, comment that "it sounds like movie music." This is typically stated either with some bewilderment or with scornful condescension, depending on the attitude of the listener. Therefore, it is wise to examine this reaction in advance. First of all, what is meant by the generic phrase "movie music" is usually the music composed for films between the late 1930s and the mid-1960s. But even with this qualification, movie

music is not one uniform style or "sound." These film scores were composed by individuals like Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Max Steiner, Miklós Rózsa, Franz Waxman, and Bernard Herrmann, along with lesser luminaries. Most received orthodox musical training and many were born and educated in Europe. Some, like Korngold, already had considerable international reputations before they began composing for film. Their music was rooted in the styles of the late nineteenth century, intensified by increased levels of harmonic dissonance. In short, they were Neo-Romantic composers, as defined in this study—indeed, the Neo-Romantic composers whose music is most widely known to the general public.

However, in composing for films these composers were producing a subordinate element in a work of another art form, for the purpose of enhancing that work. As such a film score was not created as an autonomous work of art, with its own integral structure. For this reason, heard apart from the film it accompanies, the score is rarely satisfying; without its own abstract logic, without intrinsically motivated thematic development, it is an incomplete artistic experience. This is the chief aesthetic defect of film scores—not the musical language in which they were composed; there can be nothing "wrong" with a musical language. Therefore, the observation that a particular composition "sounds like movie music" begs the question as to whether its musical vocabulary or its formal structure is being so characterized. The former—which, in my experience, is usually the case—is simply a superficial matter of overlapping melodic, harmonic, and instrumental usage, while the latter is a more serious criticism.

Although there are dozens of American composers born between the years 1880 and 1930 who might reasonably be characterized as "Neo-Romantic," six have been selected for detailed discussion in this study: Ernest Bloch (1880–1959), Howard Hanson (1896–1981), Vittorio Giannini (1903–1966), Paul Creston (1906–1985), Samuel Barber (1910–1981), and Nicolas Flagello (1928–1994). Each composer's body of work is characterized by an overall seriousness of purpose reflected in works of ambitious scope that attempt to address the fundamental existential and spiritual concerns of humanity. Each reveals an internally coherent psychoaesthetic point of view, or "vision," a relatively consistent standard of both workmanship and expressive urgency, and characteristic stylistic features that comprise a unique compositional "voice." Finally, the output of

each composer is generally distributed among the standard genres of opera, symphony, choral and vocal works, chamber music, and music for keyboard.

Ultimately, the selection of featured composers is arbitrary and personal. Leo Sowerby, Randall Thompson, Douglas Moore, John Vincent, Bernard Herrmann, Norman Dello Joio, Gardner Read, David Diamond, Robert Ward, Richard Yardumian, Robert Kurka, Ned Rorem, Carlisle Floyd, Lee Hoiby, Dominick Argento, and Ray Luke are all native-born composers of the specified time period who might be characterized as Neo-Romantics, and who made distinctive contributions of their own. If one considers composers who were born elsewhere, but spent much of their creative lives in the United States, one would have to add such figures as Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Miklós Rózsa, and Gian Carlo Menotti.

Therefore, it must be emphasized that the six featured composers are not to be viewed as a unified group, or "movement," of any kind, joined in some common purpose. Indeed, as the title of this study suggests, and as its content bears out, one trait shared by all six is a spirit of individuality, of independence, and even of isolation, to some extent. Nor does the selection of this group mean to imply that the music of these six composers represents the "best" of American Neo-Romanticism. Some of the music of the other figures noted above is arguably comparable in stature to the works of the composers featured here. Nevertheless, considering the lives and works of the six collectively does allow some relevant themes to emerge.

For example, it becomes clear that the 1930s was a brief period when American Neo-Romanticism may be said to have flourished: Many of its leading exponents were coming of age, asserting their creative voices, and beginning to attract the attention of the public—in Europe as well as in the United States. Howard Hanson's Symphony no. 2—essentially a Neo-Romantic manifesto—was introduced by Serge Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony in 1930, and his opera *Merry Mount* enjoyed a highly publicized premiere by the Metropolitan Opera in 1934. That same year, Vittorio Giannini's *Lucedia* was mounted by the Munich National Opera, and his adaptation of *The Scarlet Letter* created a sensation at the Hamburg Staatsoper four years later. Also in 1938, Arturo Toscanini and the NBC Symphony introduced listeners to Samuel Barber's *Adagio*

for Strings and *Essay no. 1*. Barber had just returned from two years in Europe on his Prix de Rome, during which time he had composed his Symphony no. 1 and his String Quartet. It was also during this decade that Paul Creston launched his career as composer and began his meteoric rise to national attention. During this brief period, the Neo-Romantics clearly enjoyed a central position in the configuration of the "new music" scene in America.

Perhaps most remarkable is the realization that it was during the period from 1955 to 1970—when the serialist movement and the avant-garde position in general were most dominant in American composition and when traditionalist approaches, Neo-Romanticism in particular, were most discredited—when most of the greatest masterpieces of American Neo-Romanticism were created. Bloch's Piano Quintet no. 2; Hanson's Symphony no. 6; Giannini's Symphonies nos. 4 and 5, *The Medead*, and *Psalm 130*; Creston's Symphony no. 5, *Corinthians: XIII*, *Chthonic Ode*, and *Three Narratives*; Barber's *Vanessa*, *Andromache's Farewell*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *The Lovers*; and virtually all of Flagello's greatest works were composed during this decade and a half.

The Neo-Romantic approach did not end with the generations of composers discussed here either. Later American Neo-Romantics who merit consideration include Ronald LoPresti, John Corigliano, Joseph Schwantner, Christopher Rouse, Thomas Pasatieri, Judith Lang Zaimont, Arnold Rosner, Samuel Zyman, Robert Avalon, and Lowell Liebermann. Indeed, some of these composers will be discussed in subsequent projected volumes to be organized around different thematic issues.

Much of the information included in this study has never been presented in print before. My own conceptualizations of this music—as well as access to unpublished manuscripts and recordings—have been facilitated and enriched in some cases by correspondence and direct personal contact with the composers themselves and/or with others close to them. This contact was sought as an outgrowth of my own interest in their music and of my frustration with the lack of available recordings and published information concerning their lives and work. These sources include Suzanne Bloch (occasional correspondence and personal contact between 1984–1990), Paul Creston (frequent correspondence and personal contact between 1968 and his death in 1985), Nicolas Flagello (ongoing personal contact between 1972 and his death in 1994), and Dianne Flagello (ongoing personal contact since 1986).

ORGANIZATION AND USE OF THIS BOOK

Each composer featured in this study will be discussed through a biographical overview, followed by a comprehensive survey of his compositional output. Their works will be reviewed with an eye toward identifying their distinctive stylistic features, the evolution of their creative "voices" over the course of their careers, their most important and most representative works, and their compositional strengths and weaknesses. The reactions of critics are included as well, drawn from reviews of early performances and recordings as well as from commentaries written after the passage of time and an opportunity for reflection.

An effort has been made to structure the book in such a way as to be useful to students, scholars, and performing musicians, as well as to serious music lovers and collectors of recordings, and in different ways at different times. It is not expected that everyone will read and absorb the surveys of each composer's entire output from beginning to end. The biographical portions of each chapter present narrative overviews of each composer's career, while attempting to capture something of his character, personality, and the context in which he lived. The sections addressing the composers' outputs begin with general discussions of their styles and of the natural subdivisions of their work into chronological periods or performance media, as applicable. The comprehensiveness of each chapter has been influenced not only by the varying availability of information but also by my own judgment regarding the relative importance of the totality of each composer's contribution. A list of each composer's most representative and fully realized works is provided before the works are discussed in greater detail.

The question of how much analytical detail is appropriate is difficult to answer. An effort has been made to provide descriptions that might guide and enhance listening and understanding, without indulging in excessive detail. Nevertheless, some readers may find the descriptions of individual compositions tedious and irrelevant—especially if they are not familiar with the work in question—while others may well find them superficial and insufficiently specific. A decision was made to avoid musical notation and minimize the use of specialized terminology, which will be a relief to some readers but perhaps frustrating to others.

It is hoped that this book will serve as a useful reference tool, to

be revisited time and again at different stages of the reader's process of discovery and integration. While proceeding through this book, readers are encouraged to enrich their experience and understanding by gaining access to recordings of the music discussed. Without the direct aural experience of the music itself, verbal descriptions are abstract exercises in vocabulary, of limited usefulness. In order to facilitate such access, a selective discography is included at the end of each chapter. In addition, brief musical excerpts representative of each composer will be accessible on my website, www.Walter-Simmons.com.

NOTES

1. Pierre Boulez, *Notes of an Apprenticeship* (New York: Knopf, 1968), 148.
2. Nicholas Tawa, *American Composers and Their Public* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1995), 151.
3. Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland Since 1943* (New York: St. Martin's, 1989), 68.
4. Anthony Tommasini, "Midcentury Serialists: The Bullies or the Besieged," *New York Times* (9 July 2000).
5. Tawa, *American Composers and Their Public*, 167–168.
6. Milton Babbitt, "Who Cares If You Listen?" *High Fidelity* (February 1958).
7. Charles Wuorinen, *Simple Composition* (New York: Longman, 1979), 3.
8. Walter Simmons, "Contemporary Music: A Weekend of Reflections," *Fanfare* (May–June 1981).
9. David Russell Williams, *Conversations with Howard Hanson* (Arkadelphia, Ark.: Delta Publications, 1988), 6.
10. Anne Midgette, Review of "The Seagull," *New York Times* (14 December 2002).

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Ernest Bloch: Photo by Lucienne Bloch, provided courtesy of Sita Milchev.

2

Ernest Bloch

It may seem surprising to begin a study of American Neo-Romantic composers with a European-born figure who did not come to the United States until he was thirty-six years old and whose musical identity is associated chiefly with his effort to express his Jewish heritage. The decision to make Ernest Bloch the cornerstone of this study is based on the premise that his musical output embodies precisely those qualities identified in the introduction as central Neo-Romantic aesthetic values: chiefly, the primacy of emotion, spirituality, mood, and drama; that Bloch's musical language, a fusion of both French and German elements shaped through deep immersion in both musical cultures during his formative years, represents the general vocabulary of American Neo-Romanticism: a fluid, flexible continuum from diatonic modality to true atonality, from simple triadic consonance to complex chromatic dissonance, utilized according to the expressive intentions of the particular work involved or passage thereof; and that Bloch's music projects the strong sense of purpose and powerful creative personality valued in this study and shared by the others discussed herein. Additional justifications for the inclusion of Bloch—though admittedly less central—are that the overwhelming majority of his music was composed in the United States and that, as a seminal figure in the formation of two important conservatories, he contributed significantly to music education in this country as well.

Perceptions of Ernest Bloch's identity within music history have

shifted as views of the overall terrain of twentieth-century music have undergone conceptual transformation. After immigrating to the United States from Switzerland in 1916, Bloch enjoyed nearly two decades of recognition as one of the most forceful creative voices in America. His attempt to express the essential soul of the Jewish people was viewed by Modernist commentators as a radical assault on smugly complacent American notions of good taste, as distilled secondhand and diluted from Western European aesthetic values. By the 1930s, however, his lack of interest in pursuing experimental techniques and his efforts to broaden his expressive range beyond matters of ethnicity left him open to charges of middle-brow conservatism. As the years passed, his role in American musical life grew increasingly peripheral. Spending his final decades in virtual isolation, he experienced an astonishingly productive "Indian Summer," the fruits of which went largely unnoticed by the music world. By the time of his death, a few works from early in his career had been absorbed into the standard repertoire, but his reputation never expanded beyond that of a "Jewish composer." However, from the perspective of this study, Bloch's works on Jewish subjects, though an important aspect of his output, can be seen as but one phase of a large and varied body of music. In describing his approach to creativity, his words capture the ethos of Neo-Romanticism: "I have no system other than to say what is in me. . . . I never attempted to be 'new,' but to be 'true' and to be human. . . . Everything that has a soul, everything that has character, everything that is true is beautiful" (recalled by S. Bloch).[1]

BIOGRAPHY

Ernest Bloch was born in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1880, the youngest of three siblings. His family, whose ancestry was Swiss for several generations, displayed no musical talent or interest of any significance. His father, who was almost fifty when Ernest was born, has been described as a nonreligious Jew, rigid and patriarchal, with a pessimistic outlook on life, despite his ownership of a successful souvenir and gift shop. His mother, characterized as possessing a sunnier, more optimistic disposition, helped manage the family business. Having lost her second child before Ernest was born, she doted on her youngest.

Perhaps overly indulged, young Ernest was a hypersensitive child, frequently tormented by his peers. But he was comforted by a close relationship with his sister, who was five years older than he. She took piano lessons as a child, and it was probably her playing that introduced him to music. When he was six he was given a toy flute, on which he enjoyed picking out tunes. Although his parents had no intention of fostering his interest in music, they did afford him violin lessons with a local teacher when he was nine. He made prodigious progress and began devising his own tunes as well, to the irritation of his father, who described them as "shit-music."[2] (It is notable, in view of his father's discouraging attitude, that in retrospect Bloch typically characterized his father in affectionate terms.)

It was at the age of ten that Bloch committed himself to a life as a composer. The story is recounted that in a nearby field he built an altar of stones. Writing a solemn vow on a piece of paper, he pledged his destiny to music, placing the paper on his makeshift altar and setting it aflame. Thereafter he devoted himself to musical study with a zealous fervor.

Bloch's formal academic education ended when he was fourteen, the year after he celebrated his Bar Mitzvah. He then entered the Geneva Conservatory, where he worked under the guidance of Émile Jacques-Dalcroze (1865–1950), one of the most original musical pedagogues of his time. Dalcroze offered encouragement to the talented adolescent, working with him in solfege and composition and referring him to Louis Etienne-Reyer for violin lessons. The young student thrived in this atmosphere, making rapid progress on the violin while developing his compositional skill.

In 1896, Bloch attended a recital given by the noted violinist Martin Pierre Marsick, whose concert tour had taken him to Geneva. After the performance, the sixteen-year-old went backstage to meet him and showed him a string quartet he had composed. Marsick was so impressed that he accompanied Bloch to his father's store and persuaded his parents to send the boy to Brussels to study with Eugène Ysaye (1858–1931), the eminent violinist, composer, and conductor who had been Marsick's own teacher. Ysaye, a close associate of César Franck, was one of the most influential figures in Belgian musical life, active among those who were attempting to inspire Franco-Belgian musicians toward more elevated aesthetic aspirations. Ysaye was impressed with Bloch's violin playing, but even more so with his compositions, and strongly encouraged him

to concentrate his efforts in that direction. He recommended his own student François Rasse (1873–1955) as composition teacher, while referring him to Franz Schörg for violin tutelage. This was a highly formative period for young Bloch, who lived in Schörg's home and thrived under the supportive influence of Ysaye. The Belgian master exposed him to the music of such composers as Franck, Saint-Saens, Fauré, and Debussy, and imparted to him his own uncompromising aesthetic ideals, while introducing him to many of the musical luminaries of the time.

Although he gained much from his association with Ysaye's circle, Bloch did not enjoy working with Rasse and, in 1899, went on to Frankfurt to study with Ivan Knorr (1853–1916), who, upon the recommendation of Brahms, had become chief composition teacher at the Hoch Conservatory. In addition to helping to build his confidence, Knorr fostered in Bloch the development of self-discipline, an essential prerequisite to becoming a mature, self-sufficient composer. However, Knorr's contempt for the innovations of Debussy led to heated arguments with his intense young student. While at the Frankfurt Conservatory, Bloch met a young German pianist named Margarethe Schneider, who was to become his wife.

By 1901, Bloch had composed more than thirty works of all kinds, including a violin concerto and several large orchestral pieces, one of which, a symphonic poem entitled *Vivre-Aimer*, was inspired by Margarethe. This work was performed in Geneva that year and was favorably received. It was during this year that Bloch met another figure who was to exert a significant influence on his artistic life: Edmund Fleg (1874–1962), a fellow Swiss who was developing a reputation as a poet and historian. Later in 1901, Bloch went to Munich for the last phase of his apprenticeship, two years of private study with Ludwig Thuille (1861–1907), a student of Rheinberger who had come under the influence of Wagner. It was under Thuille's tutelage that Bloch composed his Symphony in C-sharp minor, generally considered to be his first mature work.

The year 1903 was something of a turning point in Bloch's development as a composer. Bidding farewell to Thuille, he traveled to Paris, where Debussy's music—most recently, his opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*—was generating considerable controversy. Bloch had become a staunch admirer and defender of the Frenchman, and the two spent some time together. (Although Bloch recalled their talks warmly, years later Debussy maligned him to third parties with

cruel disdain. Kushner quotes from Debussy's letters such contemptuous remarks as, "I was not in the least anxious to get to know [Bloch], but he put me through a torture like King Lear's"; "His voice sounds like that of a eunuch bursting into a harem. . . . He's destined for higher things, like selling guaranteed rings on the streets."[3]) While in Paris, Bloch met with Ysaye and played through his new symphony on the piano for him. Ysaye exclaimed, "This is beautiful, large, powerful, of immense scope!"[4] It was around this time that Bloch discovered the music of Mahler, attending a performance in Basel of the "Resurrection" Symphony, conducted by the composer. The experience was a transfiguring one for the impressionable twenty-three-year-old, and he expressed his feelings about this "titanic work, which can be reckoned among the greatest ever born of human genius" in an article published the following year in *Le Courrier Musical* (Paris). In reply, Mahler wrote to the young composer, "I live in the world like a stranger. It is seldom that the voice of a fellow-spirit reaches my ear."[5]

It was also in 1903 that Bloch became reacquainted with Edmund Fleg, and the two began to develop an intense friendship. Their enthusiastic conversations led to the formulation of an ambitious project: an operatic adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, with libretto by Fleg and music by Bloch. Within a year, Fleg had completed his adaptation of the play into a libretto in French, and Bloch began composing the music. He worked feverishly on the project, although it was during this period that he and Margarethe were married in Geneva. (A son, Ivan [1905–1980], was born the next year; two daughters followed: Suzanne [1907–2002] and Lucienne [1909–1999]. Suzanne became a lutenist and specialist in early music; however, she devoted much of her later years to compiling biographical information on her father and annotating his works. Indeed, her documentation and recollections provided much of the source material for the biographies by Robert Strassburg and David Z. Kushner and, hence, for the present biography as well.)

Bloch had to fit his composing into a busy schedule, as the young husband and father also had to devote much of his time and energy to working in his father's store in order to support his family. Yet he managed to complete the music for *Macbeth*, along with an orchestral piece and several song cycles, within three years. *Macbeth* was completed in short score in 1906, at which point Bloch assumed the responsibility for trying to engender interest in the work and, hope-

fully, to bring about a performance. Meanwhile, his friend Fleg had become "radicalized" into Jewish nationalism by the Dreyfus Affair of the 1890s and its aftermath. He was to become a leader of what was known as the "Jewish Renaissance" movement in France. Up to this point, Bloch's own exposure to Judaism and its traditions had been no more than perfunctory. However, Fleg's intense preoccupation began to awaken Bloch's own interest. Around this time he wrote to Fleg, "I have read the Bible . . . and an immense sense of pride surged in me. My entire being vibrated, it is a revelation. . . . It stirred me so much that I could not continue reading, for I felt fear . . . of discovering too much 'me' myself, to feel in a sudden blow all that had little by little agglomerated and stuck to me drop away, leaving me naked, in this past that was within me. I would find myself a Jew, raise my head proudly as a Jew."[6]

Bloch's efforts to interest opera companies in *Macbeth* had been futile until a private reading in 1907 prompted singer Lucienne Bréval and critic Pierre Lalo to bring the work to the attention of Albert Carré, director of the Paris Opéra Comique. He was sufficiently impressed that he agreed to schedule the opera for performance in 1910, casting Mlle. Bréval as Lady Macbeth. Galvanized by this promising turn of events, Bloch turned his attention to orchestrating the opera, completing the task in 1909.

In 1908, Bernard Stavenhagen led the first complete performance of Bloch's Symphony in C-sharp minor in Geneva. During this period, Bloch also fulfilled several engagements as conductor of the orchestras of Lausanne and Neuchâtel. His performances were well received, and these positions might have become more enduring had not his erstwhile student (and later advocate), then twenty-six-year-old Ernest Ansermet, successfully lobbied for those positions himself.

The premiere of *Macbeth* took place in Paris in November 1910. Although it enjoyed a successful run during that season, and drew substantial praise from critics, it disappeared from the repertoire for reasons that have been attributed to political intrigues involving several members of the cast. Although the opera was not seen again until 1938, when it was produced in Naples, the Parisian performances drew enthusiastic praise from the twenty-three-year-old Nadia Boulanger and from forty-four-year-old Romain Rolland. Rolland, a novelist, dramatist, and music critic (who was to win the Nobel Prize five years later), became a vigorous champion of Bloch's music, and the two developed a close friendship.

In 1911, Bloch's father became seriously ill, and the composer had to return to Geneva to manage the family business. But he also took advantage of the opportunity to lecture on aesthetics and related subjects at the Geneva Conservatory. Over the course of the next four years he gave a total of 115 such lectures. During this period, Bloch's absorption in his Jewish heritage was becoming an all-consuming passion, somewhat like a "conversion experience." A grand idea began to take shape in his mind: a type of music that would "express the greatness and destiny" of the Jewish people. Prophetically, he wrote to Fleg:

> I am producing nothing so far, but I feel that the hour will come and I await it with confidence, respecting this present silence imposed by all-knowing natural laws. There will be Jewish Rhapsodies for orchestra, Jewish poems, dances mainly, poems for voice for which I have no words, but I would wish them to be Hebraic. A whole musical Bible will come, and in me will sing these secular chants where the whole Jewish soul, profoundly national and profoundly human, will vibrate. New forms shall be created, free and well defined, also clear and sumptuous. I sense them without seeing them yet before me. I think one day I shall write songs to be sung at the Synagogue in part by the minister, in part by the faithful. It is really strange that all this has slowly emerged, this impulse that has chosen me, whose outer life has been a stranger to all that is Jewish.[7]

Then, in 1912, Bloch was galvanized into creative activity, producing the first work of what became known as his "Jewish Cycle": a setting of Psalm 114 (with text in French) for soprano and orchestra, dedicated to Fleg and his wife. The following year the elder Bloch died, and Ernest composed *Trois Poèmes Juifs* in his memory. This was followed by two more psalm settings—22 and 137. In 1915, Bloch conducted his Symphony in C-sharp minor in Geneva. In attendance was Romain Rolland, who wrote to the composer, "I do not know any work in which a richer, more vigorous, more passionate temperament makes itself felt."[8]

By 1916, Bloch had completed the *Israel Symphony*, which introduces solo voices into the last movement, and the work for which he is best known today, *Schelomo*, a "Hebraic Rhapsody" for cello and orchestra. Despite the intensity of his creative drive, Bloch had little success in engendering interest in his music among those in his immediate locale. Alfred Pochon, a violinist with the Flonzaley

Quartet, had urged him to consider a visit to America. Although the world was in the throes of war, an opportunity arose when Bloch learned that the English interpretive dancer Maud Allan was looking for a music director to assemble and conduct a small orchestra to accompany her on a tour of the United States. He applied for the position and was accepted. Armed with letters of introduction from his friends, he left his family in Geneva and sailed for New York, arriving in July 1916. Although the tour was aborted after two months, Bloch found himself in an exciting and novel environment.

Before he had left Switzerland, Bloch had composed three movements of a large string quartet. Now, finished with the Allan tour, he composed a finale to the quartet while pursuing some of the contacts that had been arranged for him, among them violinist, conductor, and educator David Mannes and critics Paul Rosenfeld and Olin Downes. Downes later described his first encounter with the composer:

> The experience was unique and unforgettable; the scene on an afternoon in a stuffy little bedroom with an upright piano in it, here in New York, where a maniac with blazing eyes, jet-black hair and a face lined with suffering and will and vision sat at the piano, beating it as a madman his drum, and bawling, singing, shouting, released a torrent of music which poured out of him like lava from a volcano. There was the visitor's sudden realization that he was privileged to stand in the presence of a genius—an overworked term. This however was genius, and no mistake. The piece was "Schelomo" which at that time had not been heard in America: a torrent of music, bitterly passionate, exalted, and purple and gold.[9]

The Flonzaley Quartet decided to present Bloch's newly completed work on a program in New York City on the penultimate day of 1916. The performance made a stunning impact (a critic for *Musical America* called it "one of the greatest pieces of music composed in the last twenty years"[10]), setting off a chain reaction of auspicious performances that spread Bloch's name rapidly throughout the music world. Early in 1917, Olin Downes introduced Bloch to Karl Muck, then music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Bloch took the opportunity to play through his *Trois Poèmes Juifs* for the German conductor. According to the recollection of Suzanne Bloch, Muck found the music "beautiful" and expressed his inclination to present the work, adding, "But Mr. Bloch, how can one per-

form in Boston . . . a composition with such a title as *Three Jewish Poems*? This is a problem." Indignantly, Bloch began to leave, when Muck reconsidered and stopped him, inviting the composer to conduct the work himself the following March.[11]

Concurrently, Adolfo Betti, another member of the Flonzaley Quartet, who was also on the advisory board of the New York Society of the Friends of Music, brought Bloch and his music to the attention of Harriet Lanier, the Society's founder. Impressed by Bloch's sincerity, she arranged for the Society's conductor, Artur Bodanzky, to look at several of his scores. Upon examining them, the conductor reportedly exclaimed, "*This* man is a genius!" and immediately agreed to devote an entire program to Bloch's music. The historic concert, presented at Carnegie Hall on May 3, 1917, included the premieres of the three Psalm settings, *Schelomo*, *Trois Poèmes Juifs*, and the *Israel Symphony*, the latter conducted by Bloch himself. Herbert Peyser described the concert as "the most significant event of the year in New York."[12]

During the summer of 1917, Bloch braved the high seas during wartime to sail back to Switzerland, where he gathered together his mother, his wife, their three children, and a few possessions, and brought them back with him to New York. He returned to find an invitation from David Mannes to head the theory department of his conservatory, which he had opened the previous year. Bloch accepted the position, which brought an element of stability into what had become a very exciting life.

In January 1918, Bloch conducted the Philadelphia Orchestra in a program of his Jewish works to enthusiastic acclaim from both audience and critics. Two months later, he conducted his Symphony in C-sharp minor at Carnegie Hall. *Musical America*'s Herbert Peyser described it as "a titanic utterance, an astounding creation."[13] By now Bloch was recognized as "the" composer of Jewish music and an important exemplar of the "Jewish Constructionist" movement, which viewed Judaism as a living tradition, in continuous evolution as it adapted to developments in modern life. G. Schirmer created a logo especially for their Bloch publications, with the composer's initials engraved within the Star of David. In a 1917 interview, Bloch made what is probably his most-often-quoted statement on the meaning of his Jewish works:

> It is the Jewish soul that interests me, the complex glowing agitated soul, that I feel vibrating through the Bible; the freshness and naiveté

> of the Patriarchs; the violence that is evident in the prophetic books; the Jews' savage love of justice; the sorrow and immensity of the Book of Job; the sensuality of the Song of Songs. All this is in me, and it is the better part of me. It is all this that I endeavour to hear in myself and to transcribe in my music: the venerable emotion of the race that slumbers way down in our soul.[14]

Later in 1918, Bloch became involved with a progressive summer arts academy in Peterborough, New Hampshire, where he developed and practiced his own ideas regarding arts education. He met and developed a friendship with Julius Hartt, who invited him to teach at the college of music he had recently founded in Connecticut. Bloch also formed and conducted a community chorus in New York City, for the purpose of performing the music of Josquin, Lassus, and Palestrina. At the time this music was barely known, but Bloch had great affection for it, which he attempted to convey to others around him. However, neither the music nor his advocacy was able to ignite sufficient enthusiasm, and the chorus was soon disbanded.

In 1919, Bloch's newly composed Suite for Viola and Piano won the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Award. By this time, he was at the forefront of modern composers, among the most controversial creative figures in America. How might Bloch's phenomenal success be explained? Charles Brotman and others have described American musical institutions during the first decades of the twentieth century as still chiefly dominated by sternly Germanic aesthetic ideals, tempered by Anglo-Saxon notions of propriety and restraint. Bloch's intensely passionate music—not to mention his uninhibited personal manner, enhanced by his unabashed assertion of his Jewishness—was experienced as a bold assault on the repressed sensibilities of these entrenched institutions, somewhat along the lines of a "noble savage." Viewed as a representative of earthy humanity, he and his music were seen as an antidote to the timid propriety of these established institutions and were embraced as a vital, revolutionary voice by the spokesmen for a radical Modernism. However, this was an early, Freudian manifestation of Modernism, represented by the unrestrained expression of primal emotional truth rather than by the display of experimental techniques, and was hence an offshoot of Romanticism. Brotman notes, "As these critics and composers mounted their assault on the Victo-

rian cultural establishment, the utter Jewishness of Bloch, not necessarily the number of dissonances in his music, seemed for many as exotic, provocative, and groundbreaking as Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps*."[15] This view was clearly articulated by the influential Modernist critic Paul Rosenfeld, who became one of Bloch's most fervent advocates during the late 1910s and 1920s. "Unlike the 'theatric Orientalism' of the Russians, Bloch's music [according to Rosenfeld] 'married' European form with 'the sensuousness of Asia,' and it did so . . . by fearlessly expressing 'what is racial in the Jew.' Rather than emulating the mere 'Jewish composer' who sought to color his compositions with 'Semitic pomp,' Bloch emancipated his hereditary impulses, using 'crude dissonances . . . savage and frenetic in their emphasis' when he felt necessary." Brotman quotes Rosenfeld's assertion that Bloch, along with Schoenberg, were "'the most important spirits of the new period,'" and that "Bloch created 'as Barbaric a music as any produced by a member of the occidental civilization.'"[16]

The revolutionary power of Bloch's music had reached as far as Italy, where the distinguished critic Guido Gatti wrote in 1920, "Bloch's period of fruition synchronizes almost exactly with the tremendous conflict whereby the world has been convulsed and overturned as by a terrific earthquake; can this signify that the new epoch is beginning, and that, in matters musical, Bloch is to be its leader? To affirm this seems venturesome; and yet we venture to do so, so many are the signs and tokens which present themselves to confirm us in our idea."[17]

In 1920, Bloch accepted an invitation to create and head a conservatory in Cleveland, Ohio. In the United States fewer than five years, he vigorously assumed the responsibility for hiring a faculty and shaping a curriculum according to his own ideas, which can be gleaned from the following excerpt from an essay published in 1922:

> As it is obvious that sensibility, taste and creative forces cannot be acquired, artistic education must limit itself modestly to the study of technique, and the stimulation of the latent emotional faculties of the pupils. Let me admit at once that I do not believe in the efficiency of books on music, treatises on harmony or counterpoint, and all these scholastic and lifeless rules which are used in the official schools. These things are on the border only, of true art and life. On the contrary, the deep and assiduous study of the great works of all times

> seems to me indispensable to anyone who wishes a thorough knowledge of any art, music especially. To help a child acquire the means to undertake this pilgrimage, to teach him to listen, observe and judge, seems to me the only aim of a sensible musical education.[18]

Two years after opening its doors, the Cleveland Institute of Music had a student body numbering more than four hundred. Bloch himself conducted the Institute chorus and orchestra and taught advanced composition. He also wrote articles and delivered lectures on a variety of musical subjects for the local community, often speaking out against the emotional sterility of "technique and brain-begotten virtuosity."

Bloch's five years in Cleveland comprise one of his most fertile creative periods. Despite the enormous administrative responsibilities involved in running the Institute, he managed to complete two violin sonatas, Piano Quintet no. 1 and *Concerto Grosso no. 1*, and more than a dozen shorter pieces. In 1924, Bloch accepted an invitation to teach several courses at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York. While he was away, a simmering power struggle in Cleveland became inflamed. By the time Bloch—who was too outspoken and volatile to be an effective political manipulator—realized what was happening, he was forced to resign. As his student and, later, colleague Roger Sessions wrote shortly thereafter:

> Cleveland's rejection of Bloch was a rejection precisely of the best that he had to give. . . . His very geniality, his force of conviction, his ironic laughter—his richness of temperament and culture, in other words—stood in his way. The city which had summoned him, at first disarmed by his magnetism into partial capitulation, took alarm before the full impact of his personality. It was not, in the last analysis, an individual, a style, or an aesthetic that went down to defeat in Cleveland; it was rather just those disinterested and humane conceptions which form the indispensable background for artistic creation of any kind.[19]

While he was at Cleveland, Bloch had welcomed the founders of a small music school in San Francisco, who were considering a major expansion of their facilities. Their visit to the Cleveland Institute left them impressed by the scope of what Bloch had been able to accomplish in just a few years. Although he left the Institute in 1925 with much regret, before the end of the year he had accepted an invita-

tion to assume the directorship of what became known as the San Francisco Conservatory. Again he undertook the task of shaping an institution of the highest caliber, while fulfilling teaching responsibilities and continuing his own creative activity. He wrote the violin-and-piano *Abodah* for the twelve-year-old Yehudi Menuhin, who premiered it in San Francisco in 1928. A short suite for chamber orchestra called *Four Episodes* won the Carolyn Beebe Prize in 1927, while *Helvetia: The Land of Mountains and its People,* a symphonic homage to his native country, was cowinner of a substantial prize awarded by the RCA Victor Company in 1929.

But the most important development of this period—indeed, another major turning point in Bloch's career—involved a competition announced toward the end of 1925 and sponsored by *Musical America.* The magazine sought to encourage the composition of a great American symphonic work by offering a prize of $3,000 to the composer of the winning entry. The panel of judges comprised the conductors of the leading American orchestras: Walter Damrosch (New York Philharmonic), Alfred Hertz (San Francisco Symphony), Serge Koussevitzky (Boston Symphony), Frederick Stock (Chicago Symphony), and Leopold Stokowski (Philadelphia Orchestra). The prize-winning composition would also enjoy nearly simultaneous premieres by these and other major American orchestras. Bloch, who had become a U.S. citizen the previous year, began to conceive an ambitious, large-scale work in honor of his adoptive homeland. His composition would attempt to capture the spirit of America while depicting its history from the early 1600s into the twentieth century, including within its dense orchestral fabric countless folk-melodies and other national tunes. The work, entitled *America: An Epic Rhapsody,* would culminate in a simple, stirring anthem, with text in Bloch's own words. It was his hope that the audience would join in the singing of this hymn.

An examination of the sociocultural context of this competition and its implications for Bloch's reputation is recounted in a fascinating, meticulously researched article called "The Winner Loses: Ernest Bloch and His *America*," by Charles Brotman. In 1928, *Musical America* announced that Bloch's work had been selected unanimously from ninety-two entries as the winner. The award was announced with much publicity, and Bloch was heralded in the general press as a vanguard composer who had lent his genius to a work addressed with love and gratitude to the culture that had