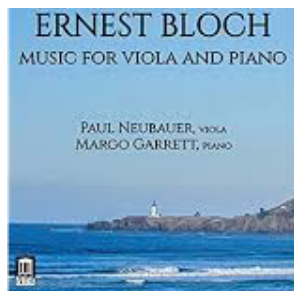


Recording Reviews

Carlos María Solare



Bloch: Suite for Viola and Piano, Suite for Viola Solo, *Suite Hébraïque*, *Meditation and Processional*. Paul Neubauer, viola; Margo Garrett, piano. Delos DE 3498

This recording was made as long ago as 2001 but the tapes were mislaid and only resurfaced last year. Most fortunately, as it happens, since they turned out to contain beautiful readings of music that is central to the viola's repertoire. Ernest Bloch's complete viola works fit conveniently on one CD; they even fit on an LP, evidenced by recordings of William Primrose and David Stimer (1956) or Ernst and Lory Wallfisch (1972). The latter even included the unfinished unaccompanied Suite from 1958, as does Paul Neubauer on this latest recording. His rhythmically taut reading underlines forcefully how near to Bach's orbit Bloch was operating towards the end of his life; several specific Bachian movements—say, the D major Prelude or the C minor Sarabande—seem to be right around the corner. There have been several attempts to complete the piece, including one by David Sills that had the blessing of Bloch's daughter. Neubauer stops where the composer's manuscript ends, leaving the listener to wonder what might have followed.

Bloch is perhaps best known for his music of Jewish inspiration. The five movements included here were written—as *Five Jewish Pieces*—in 1951 for the Chicago Covenant Club but later divided and published separately as *Suite Hébraïque* and *Meditation and Processional*. If Neubauer's rubato can be a bit fussy in some cadenza-like passages, he consistently inflects the aching melodies with deep expression and beauty of tone. Margo Garrett seconds him with complete understanding, giving a nice lilt to the strumming accompaniments of the various processional movements. The pianist comes into her own in the Suite from 1919, the piece that famously beat Rebecca Clarke's Sonata at that year's Berkshire Festival Competition. This monumental work—it set out to describe nothing less than the beginnings of life on Earth—is excitingly characterized by the duo, who once and again bring out hidden detail while always keeping an eye on the larger structure. Their biting articulation underlines the grotesque elements of the Allegro ironico, and they build up to a glorious climax in the final movement. David Brin's succinct liner notes usefully put the music in context, while the evocative cover shows a view of Bloch's last place of residence at Agate Beach, Oregon, where he wrote most of the music included here.