

Cellist Natalie Clein champions two works by Ernest Bloch at the Wigmore Hall, launching the sixtieth anniversary of the composer's death



Sunday 23 September, 11.30am

Wigmore Hall, London

Ernest Bloch *Suite 'From Jewish Life'*

Ernest Bloch *Suite No. 1 for Solo Cello*

Ralph Vaughan Williams *6 Studies in English Folksong*

Frank Bridge *Cello Sonata in D minor*

Natalie Clein cello

Yeol Eum Son piano

At a Sunday morning coffee concert on **23rd September**, cellist **Natalie Clein** and pianist **Yeol Eum Son** will perform two key works by composer **Ernest Bloch** at the **Wigmore Hall**, launching the celebration of the forthcoming anniversaries for the composer.

2019 marks the **60th anniversary** of Bloch's death in America, and 2020 the **140th anniversary** of his birth in Switzerland, and the International Ernest Bloch Society plans to mark these milestones by highlighting further performances and recordings involving outstanding musicians enamoured with Bloch's music, including **Natalie Clein**, **Raphael Wallfisch**, **Rivka Golani** and **Piers Lane**.

"He was the musician as Old Testament prophet, whose speech was thunder and whose glance lightning." – Yehudi Menuhin, friend and admirer of Bloch

The two works Clein will perform on 23 September are Bloch's *Suite 'From Jewish Life'*, and his *Suite No. 1 for Solo Cello*. Composed in 1924, when the composer had been but a few years in America, **Bloch's Suite 'From Jewish Life'** firmly establishes the composer's personal voice in three movements entitled 'Prayer', 'Supplication', and 'Jewish Song', creating an atmosphere of intense sadness and introspection.





The second piece Clein performs was composed in 1956, just three years before Bloch's death, and is part of a set of three suites for unaccompanied cello. ***Suite No. 1 for Solo Cello*** was dedicated to Canadian cellist Zara Nelsova. Here, Bloch shows a clear debt to Bach and his solo cello works and is tempered only by romantic and modernistic impulses. Alongside Bloch, Clein will also perform works by two of his contemporaries, Frank Bridge and Ralph Vaughan Williams.

Born in Switzerland in 1880, **Ernest Bloch** was so admired in his heyday that many considered him the fourth 'B' after Bach, Beethoven and Brahms. First studying violin and composition in Geneva, then at the Brussels Conservatoire, his teachers included the celebrated Belgian violinist and composer, **Eugène Ysaÿe**. He later studied composition in Germany and France.

The composer left his native Switzerland for the USA in 1916, teaching in New York, Cleveland and San Francisco. He returned to Europe in the 1930s but went back to the United States before the outbreak of the Second World War. Although he never founded a 'school' of composition, many of the most prominent American composers of the 20th century were his students, including **Roger Sessions** and **Randall Thompson**. His move to America culminated in an academic position at the **University of California, Berkeley**, where he became Professor Emeritus in 1952.



His only opera ***Macbeth***, was completed in Geneva in 1909 and performed in Paris later that year. It was revived in Naples in 1938, and the first complete American performance took place in 1960. In the UK, it was given a concert performance at the Royal Festival Hall in 1975, broadcast by the BBC. The UK stage premiere took place in 2009 during the festival commemorating the 50th anniversary of his death.

Bloch is one of the most original composers of the 20th century, and his music, whilst intellectually challenging, remains accessible to a wide audience. One of his best-known works is certainly ***Schelomo: Hebrew Rhapsody***, for cello and orchestra, completed in 1916, before the composer left Europe for the United States. Bloch was inspired to write it after seeing a statue of King Solomon, whose Hebrew name gives rise to the name of the piece. He also wrote major symphonic works called ***Helvetia***, ***America*** and ***Israel*** using traditional materials for each, and a piano concerto called ***Concerto Symphonique***.

Bloch has often been referred to as a 'Jewish composer' because a substantial number of his works carry Jewish titles, however, his repertoire incorporates a variety of influences such as Renaissance, neo-Classical, neo-Romantic, Swiss, Native American, Chinese, and Gregorian Chant. His works were regularly performed from the 1920s to the 1950s, particularly in the USA, UK and Italy.

As well as being a composer, Ernest Bloch was a prolific photographer, and his work even inspired his daughter Lucienne, a muralist who worked with Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo.

Clein will also perform work by Bloch in December, performing his **Schelomo** in Poland with the **Opole Philharmonic** on **7 December**. A concert at the **Wigmore Hall** in **September 2019** will mark the exact 100th anniversary of a dramatic rivalry between Bloch and composer Rebecca Clarke. Both had written viola pieces for a composition prize, and in this concert, cellist **Raphael Wallfisch** will perform works by both composers, renewing a century later the spirit of the competition which Bloch won.



A recent live stream from the Wigmore Hall features Wallfisch and his mother, **Anita Lasker-Wallfisch** – who survived the Holocaust – performing and discussing works by Bloch: <https://youtu.be/pFPYlieIrx4>.

Wallfisch has recently championed work by Bloch through recordings. In 2014, he released **Bloch Schelomo: Voice in the wilderness** on **Nimbus Records**, where he performed Bloch's *Schelomo* and *Voice in the Wilderness* alongside André Caplet's *Epiphanie (d'après une légende éthiopienne)*. Bloch's piece acts as the title for Wallfisch's series of recordings - *Voices in the Wilderness* - exploring the forgotten music of exiled Jewish composers. The **BBC National Orchestra of Wales** was conducted by Wallfisch's son, **Benjamin Wallfisch**. Upcoming recordings from Wallfisch include a world premiere version of Bloch's **Symphony for cello and orchestra** with conductor **Lukasz Borowicz** and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales.

The International Ernest Bloch Society (IEBS)

The **Ernest Bloch Society** was originally founded in 1937, with Vice-Presidents including Sir Thomas Beecham, Sir Henry Wood and Ralph Vaughan Williams alongside Hon. President Albert Einstein. The new **International Ernest Bloch Society** was established in London in July 2008 with Sir Charles Mackerras AC CH CBE as President, in time to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Ernest Bloch's death in July 1959. The current president is **Steven Isserlis CBE**.

The Society's aim is to promote greater awareness and appreciation of the man and his music in the 21st century, encouraging performances, recordings, and cultural events. It brings together Bloch enthusiasts throughout the world – as far afield as China and Israel – and encourages scholarly research on the composer.

For more information please contact:

Nicky Thomas Media

+44 (0) 203 714 7594 | +44 (0) 207 258 0909

info@nickythomasmedia.com | www.nickythomasmedia.com