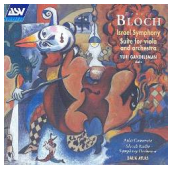
Ernest Bloch – 'Israel Symphony' for 5 Voices and Orchestra (2004)



I. Lent et solennel: Prayer in the Desert II. Allegro agitato: Yom Kippur III. Moderato: Succoth Adriana Kohútková (Soprano); Katarina Kramolisova (Soprano); Terezia Bajakova (Mezzo-soprano); Denisa Hamarova (Contralto); Michal Macuha (Baritone); Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra; Dalia Atlas (Conductor).

This work dates from 1912-16 and belongs to the composer's "Jewish cycle". The symphony evokes two Jewish traditional celebrations, "Yom Kippur" (Day of Atonement) and "Succoth" (Celebration of Harvest). The symphony is, consequently, divided in two parts. The first one comprises the first and second movements. The third includes the intervention of two sopranos, two altos and one bass, intended originally as a wordless choir, though Bloch wrote a text after the music score was complete, in order to sing syllables rather than single vowels. Bloch intended to call the work "Fêtes Juives"("Jewish Festivities"), but changed it to "Israel" by suggestion of Romain Rolland. Bloch himself provided notes for the New York Philarmonic 1943 performance of the symphony: "Though a single unit, the symphony falls into three sections. A slow introduction, Adagio molto ("Prayer in the Desert") is immediately followed by the Allegro agitato ("Yom Kippur"), with a main theme of bold, barbaric character...A short transition leads into the second part, Moderato ("Succoth") which, after a fierce climax, brings in the voice...This second part of the work is more contemplative, serene, a kind of prayer". The idiom is modern romantic, passionate, intense. As usual, Bloch did not follow a program and did not use traditional melodies. The work is Jewish in a spiritual sense. ---Hector Bellman, Rovi

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