

A black and white photograph of Ernest Bloch in silhouette, standing on a beach. He is wearing a hat and holding a pipe in his mouth. The background shows the ocean waves and a small tree to the left. The entire image is framed by a thick black border with octagonal corners.

ERNEST BLOCH

COMPOSER IN NATURE'S UNIVERSITY

Researched and written by Nancy Steinberg

Oregon Coast Council for the Arts (July 2006)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The Oregon Coast Council for the Arts extends many warm thanks to the Bloch family, especially Ernest Bloch II (son of Ivan) and Sita Milchev (daughter of Lucienne), for sharing their remembrances, documents, photos, editing skills and enthusiasm for this project.

This project was made possible by an Oregon Arts Commission Arts Build Communities Grant (FY2006-ABC-215) awarded on December 5, 2005.

In announcing the grant,
the Oregon Arts Commission wrote:

The Oregon Coast Council for the Arts will highlight the life of Ernest Bloch, a major 20th century composer who spent the last part of his life in Newport. Partnering with community groups, OCCA will produce a publication documenting Bloch’s contributions. Work will include hiring a writer and videographer to memorialize the Bloch house and develop presentations to help strengthen the arts and education in the community. Arts Commission funds will support fees to the writer, videographer and graphic artist as well as printing and costs associated with moving an existing memorial to Bloch to a more prominent site.

On March 17, 2006, videographer Casey Miller taped a discussion between Ernest Bloch II, Helen Kintner, Mark McConnell, Nancy Steinberg, and Frank Geltner in fulfillment of an Arts Build Communities Grant from the Oregon Arts Commission to highlight the life of composer Ernest Bloch. Those videotapes have now been archived. The audio content can be heard on the OCCA website <www.coastarts.org> at the Ernest Bloch Project.

Front Cover photo was used for plaque image on Bloch Memorial (now located at the Newport Performing Arts Center). The image can be seen on page 26. It was produced by Lucienne Bloch Dimitroff. Original by Oregon photographer Walt Dyke - 1950s. Back Cover photo is of Bloch on Agate Beach - 1950s - photo by Lucienne Bloch Dimitroff.

Thanks to Road and Driveway for moving the Bloch Memorial from Agate Beach to the Newport Performing Arts Center. Juergen Eckstein and Lon Brusselback helped to position the Bloch Memorial at its new location.

ERNEST BLOCH: A COMPOSER IN NATURE'S UNIVERSITY

If you stroll the beaches and streets of Newport, Oregon, you will hear a symphony of sounds: crashing waves, mewing seagulls, barking sea lions, foghorns, diesel engines of fishing boats. If you listen more carefully, though, especially if you are walking along Agate Beach, you might hear an entirely different symphony, one of lush melodies, soaring violins, percussive piano, resonant cello, lilting flutes.

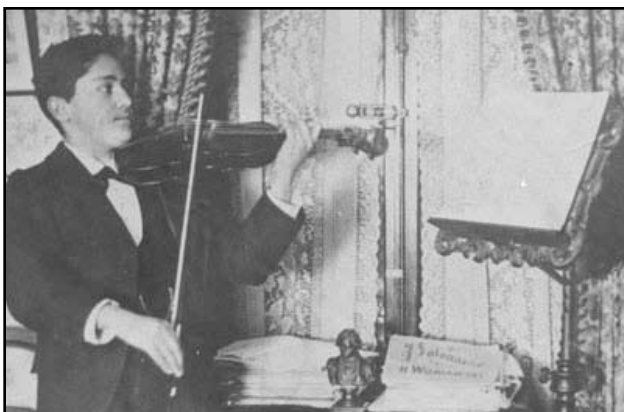
You are hearing the ghost of the magnificent music of renowned composer Ernest Bloch, who lived and composed music in a house overlooking Agate Beach from 1941 until his death in 1959. He drew his inspiration for many of his later works from the Pacific's crashing waves and the beach's changing sands.



Self portrait of Bloch at piano, Brussels - 1900s

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Ernest Bloch was born in Geneva in 1880. Although his parents were not particularly artistic, music called to Bloch even as a child. At the age of nine he vowed to become a composer and then ritualistically burned the written vow on a mound of stones. That same year he began learning to play the violin, quickly proving himself to be a prodigy. He began composing shortly thereafter, starting with some violin melodies.



Self portrait (w/Beethoven) Geneva, Switzerland

Bloch moved to Brussels at the age of 16 to study with the noted violinist Eugene Ysaÿe. He continued to compose during his three years of study with Ysaÿe, and grew as a musician, conductor and composer. After he finished his studies in Brussels, he moved to Germany, then on to Paris in 1903 and back to Geneva. While in Geneva he married Marguerite Schneider.

The couple soon had three children: Ivan (born in 1905), Suzanne (1907), and Lucienne (1909).

His body of important works was beginning to grow. His notable early works include his 1903 *Symphony No. 1 in C-sharp minor* and his

only opera, based on Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1909). He wrote the works of his self-described "Jewish Cycle" between 1912 and 1916, including the symphonic work *Israel* (1916), *Three Psalms* (1914), *String Quartet No. 1* (1916), and perhaps his best-known work, the cello rhapsody *Schelomo*, or *Solomon* (1916). These monumental works incorporated Jewish themes and melodies that were, and are today, hailed as masterpieces.

Bloch began the long westward journey that would ultimately take him to Agate Beach with a move to New York in 1916.



Bloch with the Flonzaley Quartet - 1916

Bloch went to the United States in 1916 with the encouragement of Alfred Pochon, second violinist of the Flonzaley Quartet, as conductor for a tour by Maud Allan's dance company. When the tour collapsed, he accepted a position at the newly formed David Mannes College of Music in New York,

Because success had been elusive in Europe, he took a job as the orchestra director for a new modern dance company founded by Maud Allan. This venture folded soon after he arrived in New York, and Bloch joined the faculty of the newly-established Mannes School of Music in Manhattan. Bloch was welcomed with open arms and glowing reviews by the musical community in New York. He was hailed as a genius, winning composition awards and premiering many important works.



*Bloch conducting Student Orchestra at
Cleveland Institute of Music - early 1920s*

He returned to Switzerland and brought his family back to the U.S. in 1917, crossing the Atlantic during the time of World War I submarine warfare. He was delighted to be able to bring his family to the U.S., which, as his daughter Lucienne recalled in a 1978 interview, he had described in a letter to his mother as full of a “feeling of future and of possibilities.”¹

In 1920 Bloch was invited to serve as the first Musical Director of the brand-new (and now renowned) Cleveland Institute of Music. During the Cleveland years Bloch composed some of his most notable chamber music, including the *Piano Quintet No. 1*, called by one critic “the greatest work in its form since the piano quintets of Brahms and César Frank.”²

He also honed his skills as a teacher, developing his teaching philosophy and speaking to groups ranging from music students to civic organizations. His daughter Suzanne played in the student orchestra there for a time.

He remained in Cleveland until 1925, when he continued his journey west to

San Francisco. Skeptical of the American education system, he wanted his children (the youngest, Lucienne, was 16 at the time) to continue their studies in Europe. Ivan returned to New York and the girls continued their studies in Paris.

Bloch served as the Artistic Director at the fledgling San Francisco Conservatory of Music for five years, during which time he composed three prize-winning works: *Four Episodes* for chamber orchestra (1926), *America: An Epic Rhapsody* (1927) and *Helvetia* (1929). *America*, a patriotic anthem to his adopted homeland (Bloch became a U.S. citizen in 1924), was written for a competition sponsored by the magazine *Musical America*.

New York
June 9, 1928

MUSICAL AMERICA

Volume 48
Number 8

BLOCH'S RHAPSODY WINS AWARD

Of \$3,000 in
Musical America's
Prize Contest

ERNEST BLOCH has been awarded *MUSICAL AMERICA'S* three thousand dollar prize for the finest work submitted in its Symphony Contest.

The prize winning composition, *America*, an epic rhapsody in three parts, was unanimously chosen for the award among 92 scores entered in the contest.

The prize winning score is dedicated to the memory of Abraham Lincoln and Walt Whitman "whose vision have upheld its inspiration."

"This symphony," adds Bloch, "has been written in love for this country; in reverence for its past, in faith in its future."

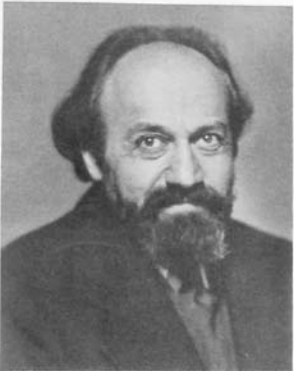
The five judges of *Musical America's* Symphony Contest were Walter Damrosch, one of the conductors of the recently merged New York Symphony and Philharmonic Orchestras, Frederick Stock, conductor of the Chicago Symphony, Leopold Stokowski, conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra, Serge Koussevitzky, conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and Alfred Hertz, conductor of the San Francisco Orchestra.

Four other scores in *Musical America's* contest received Honorable Mentions. They are:

Broadway, a symphonic work by Samuel Gardner a Jazz Suite by Louis Grassano; a *Symphony* by Robert Russell Bennett; and *The Poem*, a symphonic poem, by Wilmer Watts.

According to Frederick Stock, conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, "Ernest Bloch's score is in our opinion the outstandingly great work of *Musical America's* entire contest. The work is a triumph in every part, a work of supreme distinction, dramatic, melodious, characteristically American in idea and thought, a worthy and lasting contribution to American symphonic literature, and a work which after a short time will enjoy the popularity of both the symphonies by Louis Franck and Liszt's *From the New World*."

"I feel as if I were struck in behalf of the other judges of the Contest



ERNEST BLOCH, COMPOSER OF THE PRIZE COMPOSITION, "AMERICA"

AMERICA, Symphonic Epic, Judges' Choice

in some degree attended. If *Musical America's* excellent editor had time to write more than being the one to fight I would think it would have been scarcely worth while. As it is, there were to me about half a dozen excellent scores brought to light by this contest."

The following pages of this issue will be found informative articles about Mr. Bloch and his winning score. It is a most happy circumstance that this score was the first "Lion" and that Mr. Bloch's superb dedication to his score discussed on another page) is an excellent illustration of the nobility of spirit in which this work was conceived and carried out. But apart from these factors in the work, the judges and the editors of *Musical America* wish to emphatically state that all of the thirty-two scores submitted in this contest were considered with the greatest of interest and respect. There were compositions of all kinds, with political and social subjects, with generic programs, even with political topics. There were descriptive tone poems, program music of the most liberal type and many compositions conceived in the spirit of absolute music.

It was a curious coincidence that the two works which excited the greatest amount of interest among the judges were named *America* and *Broadway*. The latter composition was written by Samuel Gardner.

The fact that three of the judges, Mr. Frederick Stock, Mr. Serge Koussevitzky, and Mr. Alfred Hertz were able to enter in New York a few weeks ago, the fact that they immediately agreed upon Bloch's score as the outstanding work of the entire contest, all this supplemented by the praise of two enthusiastic colleagues from Mr. Walter Damrosch and Mr. Leopold Stokowski demonstrate conclusively how dominant the qualities of Bloch's score proved to be among the hundreds of excellent manuscripts submitted.

These manuscripts were entered in the contest under the usual terms of membership. Each manuscript was marked with a motto or device. The composer's name in a sealed envelope bearing on the outside the name motto or device, accompanied each manuscript. The sealed envelopes were placed in a safe through which the prize winning work had been selected, and the judges had considered their compositions in the other scores.

(Continued on page 6)

by seeing that the musical world owes a large debt of gratitude to *Musical America* for the fine opportunity it has afforded in this contest which I should like to contact next season."

"The prize winning score will be performed as soon as possible next fall by the New York Philharmonic, the Boston Symphony, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Chicago Symphony and the San Francisco Symphony orchestras. In all probability there will be a number of other performances.

It is possible that Walter Watts, such as the dean of conductors, will conduct the first performance of the work with the New York Philharmonic-Symphony. This is a matter to be decided when the conductors return to this country after their summer vacations.

Leopold Stokowski called from Geneva, Switzerland, where he is staying until August.

"Emotionally accompanied 'America' for first piano." He followed this cable with a letter which stated:

"As I called you a few days ago, I am enthusiastically in favor of 'America' for the prize. It is a noble and masterful score."

Serge Koussevitzky, conductor of the Boston Symphony, and one of the judges, stated before he sailed for Europe recently:

"*Musical America* is to be congratulated upon bringing to light such an outstanding score as Ernest Bloch's 'America.' I tell you with all the emphasis of which I am capable, that although I read a number of capable scores in this contest, when I reached the man's score I considered my judgment so attracted, the whole work was so superbly conceived and developed that there was not a moment's doubt in my mind that this work alone should receive the prize. I am delighted to hear the work is by Ernest Bloch."

Alfred Hertz, conductor of the San Francisco Symphony, was the most demonstrative of all in his enthusiasm.

"Ernest Bloch has created a masterpiece. This score may well become a classic of American symphonic literature. Bloch has succeeded superbly in doing what other composers have

**Musical America
(June 9, 1928, Volume 48, Number 8)**

First paragraph reads: "Ernest Bloch has been awarded Musical America's three thousand dollar prize for the finest work submitted in its symphony contest."

The judges, a panel of five of the nation's most highly-respected conductors, including Leopold Stokowski, unanimously chose Bloch's work as the winner. It was simultaneously premiered by the five orchestras represented by the judges – in Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and San Francisco – during the weekend of December 21-22, 1928. During the ensuing year more than 15 other orchestras presented the piece across the U.S.

When his tenure at the Conservatory was over, Bloch entered into a unique arrangement with the Rosalie and Jacob Stern family, generous patrons of the arts in San Francisco. The Sterns established a trust fund for Bloch administered by the University of California at Berkeley. Bloch was to occupy an endowed chair at the university, but dedicate himself exclusively to composition, an arrangement that supported him through his retirement in 1952. He was allowed to live anywhere he chose, and after briefly considering a stay on a South Seas island, Bloch decided to return for a time to Switzerland.



“The solo photo with the cane looks very much like Canada where my mom took photos as well with the same familiar craggy look of the ground formations. She brought back some tiny agates from there as well. He took that photo, obviously.” - Sita Milchev

His first order of business was to undertake study for composition of a commissioned piece for San Francisco's Temple Emanuel, his epic *Sacred Service*. The piece actually debuted in

Turin, Italy, in 1934, followed by performances in Naples, New York's Carnegie Hall, and Milan. Ironically, the piece was not performed in the Temple that had commissioned it until 1938.

Bloch became sick at heart at the tragedy of Nazism in Europe, a depression that sapped his creative energy. He returned to the U.S. in 1939 to teach at Berkeley, but he lived in Lake Grove, Oregon, near Portland, where his son Ivan was an engineer for the Bonneville Power Administration. It was on one of his frequent trips between Portland and Berkeley that he discovered Agate Beach.

Bloch and his wife, Marguerite, moved to Agate Beach in 1941, and Bloch lived and worked there until his death from cancer in 1959. Marguerite continued to live in the house until her death in 1963.

ERNEST BLOCH, THE MAN

Ernest Bloch was a man of tremendous integrity and passion, an intellectual who studied and analyzed Bach manuscripts in minute detail but found equal beauty and inspiration in the simple glint of an agate on the beach. He was an ardent humanist and believed passionately in justice. Alex Cohen wrote of Bloch, "Bloch's integrity, both as man and artist, is well-known, and equally characteristic are his fearlessness and his passion for justice. He has all his life fought in the interest of fair play as he sees it."³ His intensity is referenced in almost all writings about him. Milo Wold, in a 1948 *Oregonian* article, wrote, "It is physically and mentally exhausting for the average person to spend an afternoon in his presence. His keen

and intense mind takes one through a gamut of intellectual processes and emotions that are seldom experienced in a lifetime, let alone having them condensed into the short space of a few hours.”⁴ This characterization is reinforced by comments of his daughter Lucienne, who said of her father, “He was such a powerful individual that it was almost impossible not to be completely overwhelmed by his opinions.”⁵

In a statement to *Seven Arts* magazine, Bloch said of his music and philosophy, “Spiritual values can never die. The universal idea must prevail. This crucial idea has permeated all of my life and most of my works – my ultimate faith and belief in the unity of man, in spite of real racial values and dissimilarities. My faith is in justice – even delayed – on earth, in the right of each man to live his life decently and usefully and giving to the community what he can give, according to his gifts, his forces.”⁶ Bloch believed that his gift – composition – should be used in service to humankind, and would in fact “save” humanity.

The Cleveland-based composer and music critic Herbert Elwell wrote of Bloch, “...For Ernest Bloch is a believer in man and in the godhood of man. His music passionately affirms the majesty of man’s divine inheritance as unmistakably as do pages of the B Minor Mass or the Ninth Symphony [of Beethoven]. ...Bloch has established himself like Walt Whitman – in the company of the great. Let those, who can, follow in his enormously human and inspirational footsteps.”⁷

One of the people who has the most vivid

and personal recollections of Bloch is Helen (McFetridge) Kintner, formerly Helen Johnston, now of Eugene, Oregon. Helen's parents lived in Newport while she was a young University of Oregon composition student. After hearing Bloch's music in class, she was determined to meet him, especially when she found out he lived a short distance north of her parents. After exchanging letters with the composer, she became his student and personal secretary for the last 13 years of his life. Helen remembers Bloch as a passionate, intense man, even volatile at times. Understanding his nature, she says, is "like untangling knots." "His goal," she said in a 2006 interview, "was to write music that would bring peace and love to mankind,"⁸ and he would experience intense depression when he felt that that goal was not being reached. Bloch's son Ivan jokingly called him "the most optimistic pessimist I ever met."⁹

BLOCH'S MUSIC:
SHADES OF ROMANTICISM

Because Bloch was a 20th century composer, many people assume that his work will sound dissident and "modern" to their ear, and they will pass him over in their CD rack in favor of Brahms or Beethoven. While Bloch certainly experimented with harmonies, much of his work is magnificently melodic, reminiscent of Debussy and other Romantic composers. He wrote often of his extreme distaste for some of his contemporaries' work, such as Schoenberg's. In fact, many of Bloch's best-known works are the composer's reaction to modernism; they hearken back to the Romantic era of lush melodies and rich, textured instrumentation.

Jacob Avshalomov said of Bloch, “In many senses he was not a twentieth century composer ... like Strauss, in a way, he was a holdover from the nineteenth century.”¹⁰ Herbert Elwell wrote, “It has been said that the music of Ernest Bloch bears little relation to the musical fashion of his time. This may well be as true as it is unimportant. The same might be said about Bach or Beethoven. They, too, may have been born into the wrong century. But their music still lives, as Bloch’s music will continue to live, by virtue of its cosmic awareness, its just measurement of the stature of man, and its positive concern with that part which is indestructible.”¹¹

Bloch venerated the masters, particularly Bach, and never stopped studying them. He often wrote out Bach fugues from memory as a way to get inside the composer’s mind, and he had his students do the same, color-coding the works’ various musical elements. He once told Helen Johnston, “I regret not to be younger only to begin studying the masters all over again.”¹²

While Bloch was not an observantly religious man, Jewish heritage and culture were central in his life and music. Many of Bloch’s works pay homage to his Jewish heritage, although he did not tend to use actual Hebrew melodies. His most famous and most-performed work is *Schelomo*, the rhapsody for cello and orchestra mentioned above. *Schelomo* has been recorded more than 40 times by famed cellists ranging from Mstislav Rostropovich (who recorded it three times) to Zara Nelsova to Yo Yo Ma.

AN ARTISTIC EYE

Bloch was truly a multidimensional man. He was a gifted amateur photographer of note whose subjects ranged from portraits to individual trees to landscapes. His photographs – more than 6,000 negatives and 2,000 prints – are catalogued and curated by the Ernest Bloch Archive at the Center for Creative Photography at the University of Arizona. He is in excellent company: the Center also archives the works of Edward Weston, Ansel Adams, and Richard Avedon, among other renowned photographers. The guide to Bloch's collection states, "For Bloch the camera was a vehicle to record the events, the scenes, and the people in his life. He used photography as a point of departure from the taxing demands of musical composition."¹³ No less an authority than the renowned photographer Alfred Stieglitz praised Bloch's photographs. Stieglitz also sought Bloch's approval of some of his own cloud photographs, and was thrilled to receive it, writing to Bloch, "My dear Mr. Bloch: Have you any idea how much it meant to me to have you feel about those photographs as you did. . . . It was a memorable hour. A very rare one."¹⁴

In addition to Stieglitz, whom he admired greatly, Bloch made contact with other luminaries of the visual arts, including Ansel Adams, Georgia O'Keefe, Edward Weston, and Diego Rivera.

The Center for Creative Photography also keeps Bloch's death mask, a casting of his face made after his death by his daughter Lucienne and her husband. This once-common practice was usually undertaken to create a memento or portrait of the deceased but it is unusual for an immediate family member to make the death mask.

THE BLOCH FAMILY

Bloch married Marguerite Augusta Schneider, a pianist he met at the Hoch Conservatory in Frankfurt in 1904.

Mrs. Bloch effectively discontinued her musical studies upon becoming his wife. As mentioned, the couple had three children: Ivan, Suzanne, and Lucienne.



Ernest Bloch, Marguerite, Lucienne, Suzanne and Ivan, 1910s

Ivan, the oldest, showed little interest in anything artistic. He went to engineering school in New York, graduating in the late 1930s, and after living for a time in Washington D.C. he took a job with the Bonneville Power Administration in Portland. He was an engineer and businessman there for many years before moving to Bend, Oregon. Ivan had two children: Ernest II and Joni.

Ernest Bloch II lives in Portland and is actively engaged in preserving his grandfather's memory and legacy.

The Blochs' eldest daughter, Suzanne, was a renowned musician in her own right, whose specialty was Renaissance music and instruments. She taught harpsichord, lute, and composition at the Juilliard School in New York for many years. Her husband, the chair of the math department at Columbia University, worked on the Manhattan Project. They had two sons, Matthew and Anthony.

Lucienne, the youngest, was a muralist and painter who, along with her husband Stephen Pope Dimitroff, was an assistant to Diego Rivera. Lucienne had a close friendship with Rivera's wife Frida Kahlo, and took many famous photographs of her that have been included in multiple Kahlo biographies. Lucienne also took the only existing photographs of Rivera's Rockefeller Center Plaza mural which was famously destroyed because of objections to the inclusion of Vladimir Lenin in the mural. Lucienne and Stephen had three children: George, Sita, and Pencho.

While all three of Bloch's children are deceased, Suzanne as recently as 2002, all of the Bloch grandchildren are living, mostly on the West Coast. Many have attended the Newport Ernest Bloch Music Festival in their grandfather's honor.



THE BLOCH CHILDREN REMEMBER

'My closeness with father at first involved sharing his love of nature; hikes, bicycling in the countryside, picnics, mushroom hunting, rather unsuccessful trout fishing in nearby small streams. We made many trips into the Salève near Geneva, sleeping in farmhouses or barns, eating the local bread and cheeses and a finger of vin du pays in my glass of water. And I remember with pleasure his reading to the assembled children from great works of literature, with emphasis on the elements of style.

When I became an engineer, a special relationship developed. Father was fascinated by things scientific, especially the earth sciences: mycology, entomology, medicine and genetics. He often said he wished he'd become a man of science or a doctor of medicine. I am certain had he chosen any of these paths, he would have achieved greatness because of his unbelievable powers of observation, logical deduction and discipline. Much of this could be related to the voracious reading and pondering he did in philosophy, aesthetics and the basic sciences. His mind was never at rest (he was afflicted with insomnia to boot). He pursued constantly a myriad of questions about the great mystery in the logic of the universe: all in its place, all in synergetic relationship, and all veritably inexplicable. ...

He was virtually tireless, unstoppable, and endless. He wore out his listeners, no matter how devoted. He was bursting with ideas, tirades on the "mismanagement of the planet," and always questions on how society was organized and disorganized, whereas nature seemed to operate within a grand scheme.

But when walking in the woods, looking for his favorite chanterelle spot, traversing dewy meadows, climbing the gentle slopes of the Oregon countryside or Switzerland, fishing in a quiet brook or lake, then he was enveloped by a pervasive peace which bathed those who happened to be with him. I cherish those moments when he would stop to look at a flower or a leaf on a tree in silent wonder and reverence. Then he did not need to talk. He absorbed and renewed himself.

-- Ivan Bloch, April 1980¹⁵

‘Though he is remembered vividly as a teacher by his many students, the rare portraits of Bloch as a student come to us from anecdotes told by our parents and from the letters he wrote to his sister when as a teenager he attended the classes of Eugene Ysaÿe in Brussels. He had shown definitive talent for the violin in early years and performed with success at the age of eleven. But of this he remembered little. His clearest early recollection was of the beautiful Letitia Picard, who lived across the street; he would stand by his open window practicing persistently all the brilliant passages of his repertory, hoping to impress her. She, being older, ignored him completely.

Ysaÿe had seen some of Bloch’s compositions and strongly urged the youth to concentrate on writing music. When he was twenty he went to Frankfurt to study with the famed Iwan Knorr. The relationship lasted a year; they couldn’t get along. ... Yet when they parted, it was with mutual respect. Bloch never failed to express the gratitude he owed to Knorr, who showed him the path to self-sufficiency, how to use music, not textbooks. All of this would be important to his students. ... As a little girl, I received much of these ideas. When he taught me the first rudiments, the instructions he wrote in a notebook were so clear and concise that what would be considered a year’s course took not very many pages. ...

Bloch at the age of seventy-one was still as much a student as a teacher. When he retired from teaching and was living quietly in the big house on the cliff overlooking the ocean, late in the evening he would shuffle off to his bedroom and lie down with a score of music – old or new – propped in front of him, his glasses slipping a bit after a while, listening as he read, conversing with his friends, grateful for what they were telling him in the silence of the night.

-- Suzanne Bloch Smith¹⁶



Ernest Bloch in Switzerland - photo by Valentine Hirsch

‘Living with father was like living on top of La volcano. We were a close-knit family, but there were periods of quiet and periods of explosion, and every tremor affected us. To mention only the quiet moments would be to tell only half the story.

We lived in apartments and rental houses from the time I was born to the last twenty years of his life, when he finally found a home in Agate Beach, Oregon. Though we moved from place to place, the Bloch atmosphere was always there. Home was the sound of the music he composed played on the ever-present piano, the aroma of his pipe, the living room’s shelves of precious books, the life-size crucifix and the ever-present cat, Zizi. ...

‘His Pastorale mood is the memory of him I cherish most. We took long hikes with “le Papa” from the time we were able to walk. With his knapsack of fruit and Swiss chocolate, his camera slung over his shoulder, he would lead us into the country. He taught us all about mushrooms. We picked berries, climbed mountains. Enjoyment of nature was part of our lives, not only in Europe, but later in America – even in New York, when we went to Central Park every day before we knew enough English to go to school.

- Lucienne Bloch Dimitroff, April 1980¹⁷

THE AGATE BEACH YEARS

The composer first came to Agate Beach in 1941 and found his final home, the only one he ever owned, purely by chance. As his grandson, Ernest Bloch II, tells it, he was driving from Portland to California on his way to teach at UC Berkeley. He decided to take the leisurely coastal route, but Highway 101 was blocked near Agate Beach by a condition all too familiar to coastal residents: the road was flooded. He was forced to stop and spend the night. Although the road was clear, he was still there two days later because he had become so enamored of the area. He was particularly delighted with the area’s abundant mushrooms, of which he was a connoisseur and a gourmet. Then and there he found a house for sale, a vacation home built by Ashael Bush,



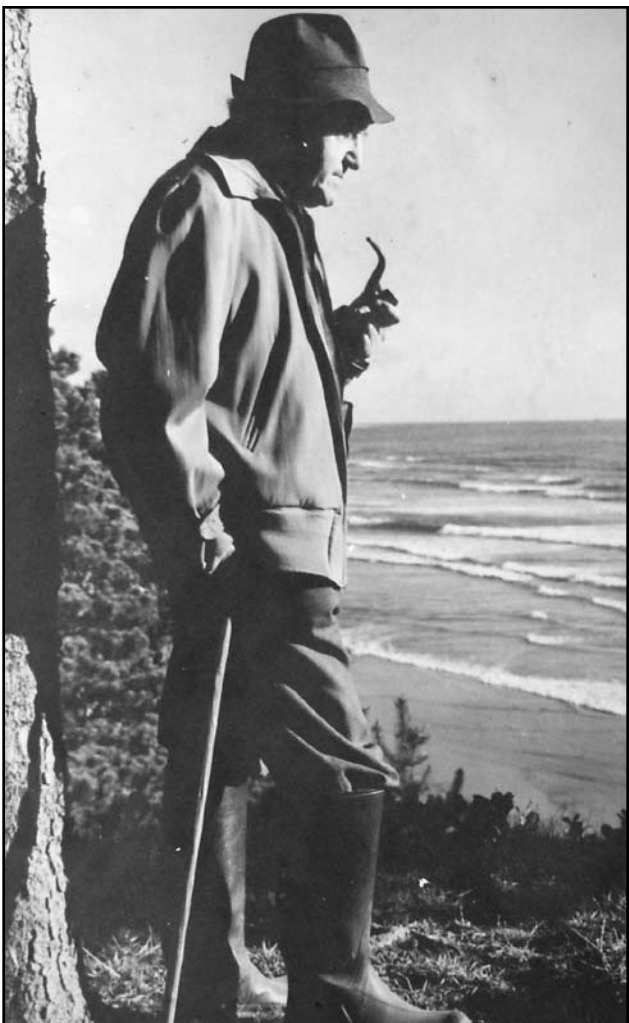
*Ernest Bloch II remembers: "He and I used to sit on that bench and rest after the climb up from the beach - Agate Beach early 1950s
Photograph by Lucienne Bloch Dimitroff"*

the Salem, Oregon, newspaper magnate, and bought it. Grandson Bloch recalls that he said, "It will please my wife because it's depressing and will remind her of Hamburg, Germany!"¹⁸ Granddaughter Sita (daughter of Lucienne) believes Bloch also wanted to give her back the sea she loved so much. He and Marguerite moved into the house later that year. While their three children were grown, they and the Blochs' grandchildren were frequent visitors to the house.

As David Z. Kushner wrote in his 2002 book about Bloch, the move to Agate Beach "shaped both the personal and professional side of Bloch's life in ways that could not have been foreseen."¹⁹ Bloch suffered a severe case of "writer's block" during World War II, brought on by his extreme depression about the events of that time. During the war years he wrote almost nothing. His new home provided the solace, quietude, and soothing natural beauty that helped restore his creativity after the war ended. In August of 1944, about three months after the end of the war, he completed his first work in many years, the *Suite symphonique*, a three-movement orchestral work.

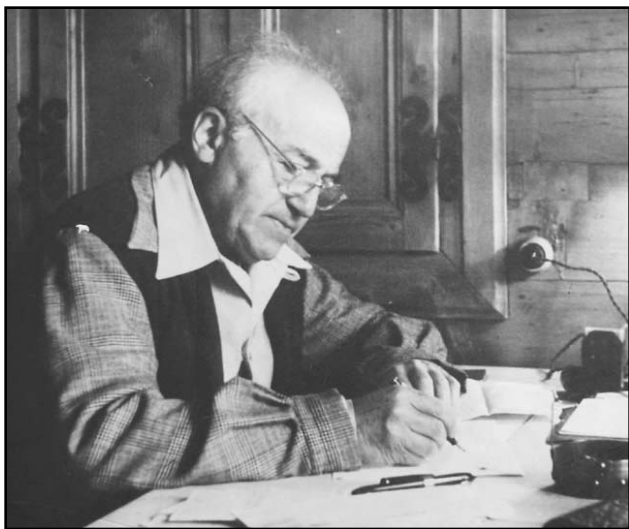
His creative spirit renewed by the beauty

around him, Bloch wrote some of his most magnificent and renowned works in the house at Agate Beach. Many critics have written of the distinct style that characterizes the works written during Bloch's time here. David Kushner wrote, "The compositions of the Agate Beach period are, for the most part, an amalgam of Bloch's best creative impulses."²⁰ He adds later, "The music written in Oregon reflects a general change in compositional emphasis. The works become increasingly objective, even absolutist."²¹ Rather than winding his career down toward the end of his life, his last ten years were particularly prolific and creative. Robert Strassburg wrote, "The creative sequence of Bloch's closing years is remarkable for its



Bloch at Agate Beach - 1950s - Photo by Walt Dyke

unflagging vitality, spontaneity, and expressive force. Asked for the secret of his creative power during his last decade, Bloch pointed to his self-reliance and his almost child-like faith in God: ‘All my life I have attended God’s university. . . . In God’s university one finds many assistant instructors with Nature as the head of the faculty.’”²²



“The picture with the European Electric plug, was taken at Valentine’s apartment in beautiful downtown Geneva, with the five floor walkup! I was there and remember that room. He was in Europe when this photograph was taken by her (Valentine).”
[Valentine Hirsch was a relative of Bloch] - Sita Milchev

His *String Quartet No. 2*, written in 1945, was awarded both the prestigious New York Music Critics’ Circle Award as well as the very first Gold Medal for Music of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. The New York Music Critics’ Circle honored him again in 1953 for two other Agate Beach works, the *String Quartet No. 3* and the *Concerto Grosso No. 2*. The 1951 *Suite hébraïque* for viola or violin and accompanying piano or orchestra uses Jewish-inspired themes much like the works of his “Jewish Cycle.” His *Symphony* for trombone and orchestra, completed in 1954, took him six months to write, and has been recorded by ensembles ranging from the USSR Symphony Orchestra to the Portland Youth Philharmonic. Other works written during these years include

three more string quartets, his *Piano Quintet No. 2*, his *Symphony in E-flat major*, and a series of solo string suites, three for cello, two for violin, and one unfinished suite for viola. Of these works, the renowned violinist Yehudi Menuhin wrote, “The greatest music he wrote during the last period of his life may be found in his suites for solo strings, three for cello and two for violin, perhaps the finest since Bach. Into these suites he poured his most profound musical thoughts with great logic and eloquence.”²³ Bloch’s final work is appropriately entitled *Two Last Poems (Maybe ...)*, the first subtitled *Funeral Music* and the second, *Life Again?* Clearly Bloch was contemplating the end of his life.

Bloch loved to collect mushrooms in nearby wooded areas and hunt for agates on the beach. His grandson keeps a collection of beautiful agates Bloch polished himself in a workshop in the Agate Beach house’s detached garage. According to one observer, “Whenever he works consistently each day at his agates, the problems of composing seem to resolve themselves more fully.”²⁴ He was as passionate about his last home as today’s residents and visitors are. Many music critics, and his grandson and Helen Johnston, point out that he drew direct inspiration from his Agate Beach surroundings. Daughter Lucienne commented that Bloch had a “sense of being uprooted his entire life ... The only thing that gave him a sense of belonging was nature.”²⁵ Surrounded by nature in his Agate Beach home, Bloch certainly would have had a sense of belonging here.

As a teacher he also turned to nature for inspiration. Johnston recalls one of their many

composition lessons that took place not at the piano but on a bench along the trail between the house and the beach. The subject of that day's lesson was musical repetition. Bloch pointed to a bare tree and said, "You look at that tree and you can see the outer form; it's a tree, but within the form is a lot of diversity. On the tree the branches sometimes come out from the trunk at the same point, but in due time they're staggered a bit. And so within is the diversity and without is the form. That's why we don't want to repeat themes too often, but the human mind needs to be referred back to something that's familiar."²⁶

Although Bloch was, by his own choice and admission, fairly isolated from the musical world at the Agate Beach house, he and his wife received a number of musical luminaries as guests during their years there. Bloch's late solo violin suites were commissioned by famed violinist Yehudi Menuhin on a visit to Agate Beach. Jacob Avshamolov, the composer and conductor of the Portland Junior Symphony, stopped by for an impromptu visit and was welcomed by Bloch with open arms. Lucienne Bloch recalls that composer Igor Stravinsky visited her father at the house. Bloch's dear friend Hungarian violinist Joseph Szigeti enjoyed the view, and an enduring friendship and musical collaboration was born when cellist Zara Nelsova came to Agate Beach to study with Bloch. Bloch's student Herbert Elwell, the composer and critic, came to stay as well.

Locals in Lincoln County still remember Bloch. Many encounters took place on the beach below Bloch's house. Peggy Rariden, a community legend who passed away in 2004,

probably had the most vivid memories of Bloch from her childhood; she helped keep Bloch's legacy alive by serving on the Board of Directors of Newport's Ernest Bloch Music Festival for 15 years. Peggy remembered an imposing cloaked figure striding the beach. The overwhelmed young girl asked Bloch, "Are you Superman?" He responded mischievously, "Oh, no, I'm somebody much more important than that!"²⁷

Jeff Hollen, now an attorney in Newport, where he grew up, remembers meeting Bloch on the beach as well, perhaps a year or two before the composer died. Young Hollen and some friends were building a fire on Agate Beach, when they were approached by an old man who warned them not to play with fire. He invited them up to his house for hot cocoa, which Hollen remembers as the best he's ever had. "It was probably good European chocolate," he says now with a smile. Hollen recalls that while he and his friends were enjoying the cocoa, his mother was looking for him and he got into trouble for wandering out of earshot that day.²⁸

Current Siletz (Oregon) resident Judy Young also grew up in the Agate Beach neighborhood, and recalls that she and her friends loved going to the Bloch house trick-or-treating on Halloween, because he gave out nickel candy bars rather than penny candy, a rare treat. Judy wrote in 2005, "...for several years he never forgot us – and needless to say we never forgot him. I remember a kindly looking man opening the door and treating us with such generosity we were pretty much in awe [of him]."²⁹ Connie (Hocken) Killion of Newport, who would often deliver groceries to the Blochs with a friend,

recalls the large candy bars too. She adds that the children were required to come into the house and sing before they got the treats! Bloch played the piano while his wife looked on, smiling.³⁰

The house is perched just above Agate Beach to the south of Yaquina Head. Its expansive great room is dominated by a large fireplace and windows that overlook the surf.

During Bloch's time in the house a piano occupied a prominent place in the living



Ernest Bloch at the piano in his Agate Beach house. Although he was Jewish, the large crucifix was a prominent fixture in the house, representing for Bloch the common suffering - and potential for redemption - of humankind. Helen Johnston Kintner remembered that Bloch often stated that "Christ was the only true Christian who ever lived."

room, but he composed mostly at his desk, and later in a studio over the garage (although granddaughter Sita remembers that he would review passages from works in progress on the piano). A precipitous trail, one that Bloch walked hundreds of times, leads to the surf and sand below. The imposing bulk of Yaquina

Head and the constant beacon of the Yaquina Head lighthouse are visible off to the right.

Bloch's ashes were scattered on Agate Beach just below the house, along with those of Marguerite. A plaque dedicated to his memory, originally situated on Highway 101 near the Bloch house, was moved in 2005 to a more prominent location in front of the Newport Performing Arts Center. The inscription reads: "Ernest Bloch, Composer, Philosopher, Humanist, Lived Nearby with his Wife, Marguerite, 1939-1964. *Give Me Solitude, Give Me Nature* – Walt Whitman."

Newport commemorates this artistic giant who lived among us with the annual Ernest Bloch Music Festival every summer, which was the brainchild of Greg Steinke (then on the faculty of Linfield College); Sharon Morgan, the former Director of the Oregon Coast Council on the Arts; and others. The festival honors Bloch with concerts of classical music – his compositions and many other works – and a Composers' Symposium at which promising young composers work with a distinguished Composer-in-Residence to prepare brand new works for performance. Bloch's legacy as a teacher and mentor is also celebrated by the inclusion of a Young Musicians' Program component of the Composers' Symposium. High school-aged music students attend this program and take part in many of the workshops and master classes, and they also learn music theory and composition techniques. YMP participants compose a work for performance in the space of one week, and perform each others' pieces at a concluding concert. The festival reaches beyond the traditional classical repertoire

by including a free concert of “pops” music on July 4th performed by the Newport Symphony Orchestra sponsored by community mainstay Mo’s Restaurants. In addition to the Newport festival, Bloch will be honored at the Bloch International Scholars Conference in Cambridge, England in 2007 and with worldwide performances of his works commemorating the 50th anniversary of his death in 2009.

Newport is honored to have been the home, solace, and inspiration to such a creative powerhouse and humanitarian. A posthumous appreciation of Ernest Bloch written by three Berkeley faculty members summarizes Bloch’s impact: “The legacy of Ernest Bloch is in two parts, the intangible and the tangible. The intangible is the impact on his friends, associates and students: the model of an exemplary musician, unswervingly dedicated to the canons of his art. The tangible is the body of his works written over a period of sixty years: music that speaks with vigor, eloquence and beauty.”³¹



“Image” produced by Ernest Bloch’s daughter, Lucienne Bloch Dimitroff, from original by Oregon Photographer Walt Dyke and used on the plaque for the Bloch Memorial now situated at the Newport Performing Arts Center

“My mother used the photograph on the cover of this booklet to make the “logo” for the Heirs of Ernest Bloch and well as using it on the plaque for the Memorial rock.” - Sita Milchev

BLOCH RESOURCES

If you'd like to learn more about Ernest Bloch and his music, the following references and web sites can help. In addition, recordings of his music are widely available.

Kushner, David Z. 2002. *The Ernest Bloch Companion*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.

Kushner, David Z. 1988. *Ernest Bloch: A Guide to Research*. New York, NY: Garland Publishing.

Strassburg, Robert. 1977. *Ernest Bloch, Voice in the Wilderness*. Los Angeles: The Trident Shop, California State University.

Web site of BAY Music Association, which sponsors the annual Ernest Bloch Music Festival: www.baymusic.org

Web site of the Oregon Coast Council for the Arts' Ernest Bloch Project: Go to OCCA's web site at www.coastarts.org and click on "Ernest Bloch Project."

Web site entitled "A Young Person's Guide to Ernest Bloch": homepage3.nifty.com/bloch/index.htm

Web site of Classical Net, Ernest Bloch page: <http://www.classical.net/music/comp.lst/bloch.html>

Web site of Lucienne Bloch's artwork, created by her granddaughter, also named Lucienne: www.luciennebloch.com

Tapes of early Bloch Festival concerts, photos of Bloch and his family, and an archive of materials about Bloch are available at the Lincoln County Historical Society, (541) 265-7509.

Interviews with Ivan Bloch and Lucienne Bloch Dimitroff and Stephen Dimitroff were videotaped upon the occasion of the donation of Bloch's photographic materials to the Center for Creative Photography at the University of Arizona (Web site listed below). DVDs of these interviews are on file with the Oregon Coast Council on the Arts.

Extensive Bloch collections are also available at a number of institutions, including:

The Library of Congress

[http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?faid/faid:@field\(DOCID+mu003009\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?faid/faid:@field(DOCID+mu003009)),

The Center for Creative Photography at the University of Arizona <http://dizzy.library.arizona.edu/branches/ccp/home/home.html>

The University of California at Berkeley

<http://www.oac.cdlib.org/cgi-bin/oac/berkeley/music/bloch>

The University of Florida

<http://www.uflib.ufl.edu/spec/belknap/composers/bloch.htm>

The Sibley Library of Music at the Eastman School of Music

<http://www.esm.rochester.edu/sibley/specialc/findaids/bloch.htm>

The primary publishers of Bloch's music, who sell and rent scores and parts for most of his published works, are:

Carl Fischer (www.carlfischer.com)
Boosey & Hawkes (www.boosey.com)
Broude Brothers (broude@sover.net)
G. Schirmer (www.schirmer.com).

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Lucienne Bloch, interview with J. Enyeart, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, March 15, 1978.
- ² Robert Strassburg, *Ernest Bloch: Voice in the Wilderness* (Los Angeles: The Trident Shop, 1977), 56. The critic quoted is Olin Downes, writing in the *New York Times*, December 10, 1950.
- ³ Vinita Howard, “Bloch Said ‘Most Remarkable of Living Composers’,” *Yaquina Bay News – Newport Journal*, January 1, 1950.
- ⁴ Milo Wold, “Ernest Bloch: Music From Oregon Sands,” *Sunday Oregonian*, October 3, 1948, p. 7.
- ⁵ L. Bloch, 1978.
- ⁶ Wold, 1948.
- ⁷ Milo Wold, “Music From Stones,” *Northwest Roto Magazine* (*Sunday Oregonian*), November 21, 1954.
- ⁸ Helen Johnston Kintner, interview with Nancy Steinberg, February 6, 2006.
- ⁹ Ivan Bloch, interview with J. Enyeart, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, March 31, 1978.
- ¹⁰ Jacob Avshalomov, interviewed for *Ernest Bloch: A Portrait*, KOAP TV production, 1977.
- ¹¹ Wold, 1954. Herbert Elwell was a composition student of Bloch’s who became a notable composer and music critic.
- ¹² Kintner.
- ¹³ Bonnie Ford Schenkenberg, *Ernest Bloch Archive* (Tucson: Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, 1979), 5.
- ¹⁴ Schenkenberg, 6.
- ¹⁵ Ernest Bloch Music Festival at Newport, Program of the Inaugural Ernest Bloch Music Festival at Newport, May 1990.
- ¹⁶ Ernest Bloch Music Festival at Newport, 1990.
- ¹⁷ Ernest Bloch Music Festival at Newport, 1990.
- ¹⁸ John Terry, “Oregon Coast Strikes Chord with Composer,” *Oregonian*, June 22, 2003.
- ¹⁹ David Z. Kushner, *The Ernest Bloch Companion* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 111.
- ²⁰ Kushner, 8.
- ²¹ Kushner, 10.
- ²² Strassburg, 89.
- ²³ Terry, 2003, quoting from Menuhin’s memoir *Unfinished Journey*.
- ²⁴ Wold, 1954.
- ²⁵ Lucienne Bloch, interviewed for *Ernest Bloch: A Portrait*, KOAP TV Production, 1977.
- ²⁶ Kintner.
- ²⁷ Terry.
- ²⁸ Jeff Hollen, interview with Nancy Steinberg, January 17, 2006.
- ²⁹ Judy Young, e-mail to Nancy Steinberg, December 2, 2005.
- ³⁰ Connie Killion, e-mail to Nancy Steinberg, April 9, 2006.
- ³¹ Strassburg, 88. The “In Memoriam” was written by Professors A. I. Elkus, W. D. Denny, and E. B. Lawton, Jr.

