

## NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

### **ERNEST BLOCH: Suite Modale (1956)**

A native of Switzerland, Ernest Bloch came to the United States in 1916 as conductor of a ballet tour; when the company failed he remained in the USA, obtaining an appointment as theory and composition professor at the David Mannes College of Music in New York. He also conducted Renaissance choral music with amateur singers at the Manhattan Trade School. Bloch soon began conducting his works on Jewish themes in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, and G. Schirmer published them with a personal logo—the Star of David with the initials E.B. in the center, which established Bloch’s public Jewish identity. In later years, averred his daughter Suzanne Bloch—a lutenist prominent participant in New York early music circles—he wished not to be so identified. He went on to be founding director of the Cleveland Institute of Music (1920-25) and later taught at the University of California, Berkeley.

Unlike Bloch’s *Sacred Service* and *Schelomo*, for instance, the *Suite Modale* is not an overtly Jewish work. One of his last compositions, it was commissioned by conductor Efreim Kurtz for his wife, Elaine Shaffer, to whom it was dedicated. Bloch wrote it during the summer of 1956 and it was premiered on March 10, 1957 by flutist John Wummer (then principal flutist of the New York Philharmonic) and pianist Leonid Hambro on a concert of the New York Chamber Players at the 92nd Street Y; Shaffer gave the European premiere in June 1957 in London’s Wigmore Hall. Bloch later orchestrated it for her, and Frances Blaisdell played the world premiere of that version in New York’s Town Hall on May 11, 1958; apparently Shaffer did not play it publicly until 1965.

### **JOSÉ SEREBRIER: Samson and Buddha (2014)**

Born in Uruguay, José Serebrier won a US State Department fellowship to study composition at the Curtis Institute of Music and with Aaron Copland at Tanglewood. His Symphony No. 1 was premiered by Leopold Stokowski and the Houston Symphony in 1957; eight years later, he assisted Stokowski in conducting the “unplayable” Ives Fourth Symphony in its premiere at Carnegie Hall. After five years as associate conductor of the American Symphony, he became composer in residence of the Cleveland Orchestra; Serebrier was later music director of the Worcester (MA) Festival, then organized Festival Miami, which he served as its artistic director for many years. He has conducted and recorded with both the Juilliard Symphony and the New York Philharmonic. As a composer, he has a catalog of more than 100 works. *Samson and Buddha* was written in memory of Serebrier's Maltese named Samson and his stuffed blue hippo toy named Buddha. Flutists Patricia Zuber and Bart Feller gave the premiere on September 5, 2014 at Symphony Space as part of the New York Chamber Music Festival.

### **MIRIAM GIDEON: Eclogue (1988)**

Miriam Gideon, the daughter of a Reform rabbi, studied composition with an émigré Jewish composer from Russia, Lazare Saminsky, then the music director and organist at New York's Temple Emanu-El in New York. She continued her

studies with Roger Sessions, who had been a pupil of Ernest Bloch., which enabled her to develop her own palette of extratonal and pantonal idioms. She earned a master's in musicology from Columbia and taught at Brooklyn College, the Manhattan School of Music, and, for forty years, at the Jewish Theological Seminary's cantorial school, where she also earned a doctorate. Many of her works are liturgical settings, but her catalog includes many secular works that include flute. She wrote *Eclogue* for Patricia Spencer, longtime flutist of the Da Capo Chamber Players, who debuted the work on a Merkin Hall recital of five premieres in March 1988.

### **LEO ORNSTEIN: Three Pieces: A Poem (1979)**

Born in Ukraine, the son of a cantor, Ornstein was a piano prodigy who began his musical studies with Alexander Glazounov at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. In 1907, however, the family fled antisemitism and came to the USA. Ornstein then studied at the Institute of Musical Art in New York, where he met his future wife, the talented pianist Pauline Mallet-Prevost, from an old and distinguished New York family. He made his New York recital debut in 1911 and became a leading figure in new music circles in the United States, in the vanguard of experimental music. Ornstein abruptly retired from performing in 1920, and he and his wife later founded a music school in Philadelphia. He withdrew from public life in the mid-1950s but resumed composing two decades later; *A Poem* dates from 1979. Along with *Prelude and Intermezzo*, which he wrote two decades earlier, it was published in 1990 and reflects his return to neo-classicism.

### **AARON COPLAND: Duo (1971)**

Born in Brooklyn, the son of Russian immigrants who ran a department store there, Copland graduated from Boys' High School and studied composition privately with Rubin Goldmark and piano with Victor Wittgenstein and Clarence Adler. He subsequently enrolled at the American Conservatory in Fontainebleau, France, where he worked with Nadia Boulanger and others. On his return to the USA, he taught part-time at the New School for Social Research, the Henry Street Settlement, and Harvard University. A leading voice in the promotion of American music, he was active in New York's League of Composers, organized the Copland-Sessions Concerts, headed the American Composers Alliance, and co-founded the American Music Center.

The Duo for flute and piano was one of his last pieces, dedicated to the memory of William Kincaid, the legendary principal flutist of the Philadelphia Orchestra from 1921 to 1960 and teacher at the Curtis Institute, and also the first vice president of the New York Flute Club. It was commissioned by a group of Kincaid's students and friends organized by John Solum, a former president of the New York Flute Club. The work reflects Copland's self-definition as an American composer, referring to his *Appalachian Spring* and *Rodeo*, among other pieces, and has become a repertoire standard. The work was premiered by flutist Elaine Shaffer, to whom Kincaid bequeathed his platinum flute, and pianist Hephzibah Menuhin at the Settlement Music School in Philadelphia on October 3, 1971.

## **DAVID EHRLICH: Oriental Prayer: Kol Nidre with Variations (1916)**

David Ehrlich, born in Vienna, immigrated to the USA in 1878 and set up shop as a portrait artist and photographer on the Upper East Side. His professional interests gravitated toward music and he became an all-around flute entrepreneur. From an address on West 138th Street he taught flute lessons, wrote method books and a few compositions, traded in antique and new flutes, sold various accessories, and did instrument repairs. Apparently a student of one of the German flutists in New York and well acquainted with Carl Wehner, the principal flutist of the New York Philharmonic (1886-1902), whose arrival preceded that of the French school flutists, he published *The History of the Flute from ancient times to Böhlm's invention* in 1921. He is buried in Linden Hill Jewish Cemetery on Long Island, which is affiliated with Central Synagogue.

## **LEONARD BERNSTEIN: Halil (1981)**

Leonard Bernstein, educated at Harvard, the Curtis Institute of Music, and at the Berkshire Music Center (Tanglewood) under Serge Koussevitzky, became the quintessential New Yorker. Appointed assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic in 1943, he served as music director of the New York City Symphony Orchestra from 1945 to 1947 and was named music director of the Philharmonic in 1958. Conductor John Mauceri writes, "While his music finds its spiritual home in his world view, his music speaks with a New York accent, even though he was born in Massachusetts. His love affair with Europe and his sensitivity to his Russian and Jewish roots are never far from his lyrical expressivity, with its fragile sense of optimism, its loneliness, its humor and its demand for acceptance. All of this is wrapped in the rhythmic propulsion of a great American urban landscape. He has left us an aural image of his time and place and, at the same time, an eternal voice of humanity."

Many of his works are on Jewish themes, notably the *Jeremiah* and *Kaddish* symphonies. *Halil* (flute in Hebrew) is as well; Bernstein dedicated to Yadin Tenenbaum, an Israeli flute student killed in his tank near the Suez Canal during the 1973 war. Wrote Bernstein, "*Halil* is formally unlike any other work I have written, but it is like much of my music in its struggle between tonal and non-tonal forces. In this case I sense that struggle as involving wars and the threats of wars, the overwhelming desire to live and the consolations of art, love, and the hope for peace." Jean-Pierre Rampal gave the premiere on May 27, 1981 in Jerusalem with the composer conducting the Israel Philharmonic. Bernstein arranged the version for flute, piano, and percussion in 1987.

—Nancy Toff