

THREE VOICES IN THE WILDERNESS: FOOTE, BLOCH, AND
KORNGOLD IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICA

by

Ai-Lin Hsieh

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Advisory Committee:

Professor Evelyn Elsing, Chair/Advisor
Professor David Salness
Professor Denny Gulick
Professor James Stern
Professor Jennifer DeLapp

ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: THREE VOICES IN THE WILDRENESS:
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Department of Music

Barbara Hanning points out in her book *Concise History of Western Music*, that “Twentieth-century American music was in large measure an extension of European music” (Hanning 1998, 515). My dissertation/performance project features cello works written by three contemporary composers who lived in America but were connected to the European heritage in different ways; each contributed significantly to the development of American classical concert life, music education, and even popular culture. Programs of my performances are intended to illustrate their unique compositional styles. The first recital consists of five cello compositions of Massachusetts-born Arthur Foote (1853-1937): *Drei Stücke für Pianoforte und Violoncello*, Op.1; *Scherzo*, Op.22; *Romanza*, Op.33; *Aubade*, Op.77; and *Sonata for Violoncello and Piano*, Op.78. Foote was influenced by the German-trained John Knowles Paine at Harvard University; he composed music famous for its extensive chromaticism in both harmony and melodic line, and for clearly-defined formal structure.

The second recital explores the music of Swiss-American composer Ernest Bloch (1880-1959): a short *Meditation Hebraique*, a *Suite No.1 for Violoncello Solo* and the

famous rhapsody *Schelomo*. Born in Geneva, Switzerland, and settling in the United States in 1916, Bloch is a composer deeply influenced by the European late-Romantic tradition and is also well-known for employing “Hebraic” elements into his works.

The final performance comprises two other of Bloch’s cello works and one cello concerto by the Austrian-American composer, Erich Wolfgang Korngold (1897-1957). Bloch’s *Voice in the Wilderness* is a symphonic poem for orchestra and cello (accompanied by piano in this performance), consisting of six movements performed without pause. His *Suite No.3 for Cello Solo* is shorter and has a simpler style than the first Suite. Korngold was recognized as a child prodigy in his native Austria. After a Nazi-induced exile, he immigrated to America and became a film music composer in Hollywood. The *Cello Concerto* was used in the movie “Deception” (1946), for which Korngold provided the film score. The impassioned harmonic language and lavish melodic lines inherited from the high-romanticism make this work one of comparative discordant beauty among other compositions of his time.

Ai-Lin Hsieh's Dissertation Recital—

Arthur Foote (1853-1937): Selected Music for Cello and Piano
Ulrich Recital Hall, December 7th, 2002

Program Note

Drei Stucke Fur Pianofote und Violoncello, Op.1

This set of three pieces (Andante con moto, Andante, and Allegro con fuoco) was Foote's first published composition in 1882. The composer described them as "reminiscent and rather of a stencil pattern, but melodious". This piece was dedicated to cellist Wulf Fries, who often performed these pieces with Foote at the piano.

Scherzo, Op.22 and Romanza, Op.33

The *Scherzo*, and the *Romanza* are linked to one another in that at one time, Foote conceived of them as companion pieces. Moreover, both the *Scherzo*, and the *Romanza* underwent revision and changes in title, and, in the case of the *Romanza*, a change of opus number, before reaching their final forms. The *Romanza* began life as the second movement of Foote's *Cello Concerto*. The *Concerto*, originally numbered Opus 16, is an unpublished work that was begun in 1887, however, as early as 1889, the second movement of the *Cello Concerto* was arranged for cello and piano, titled *Andante from the Concerto, Opus 16*, and performed at the Boston Manuscript Club by cellist Fritz Giese with the composer at the piano. This *Romanza*, Opus 33 is only seventy-eight measures long, and some of the orchestral tutti were either eliminated or transferred to the cello; several melodic repetitions were omitted, and the form was made more compact. The *Scherzo* was performed in Cleveland in 1890 under the title *Capriccio for Cello*.

Aubade, Op.77

The *Aubade*, Opus 77, is dedicated to Alwin Schroeder, principal cellist of the Boston Symphony Orchestra and a member of the Kneisel Quartet, with whom Foote often performed. Composed in 1912, and revised in 1923, this is a ninety-four measures-long piece, in the tempo of *Allegretto grazioso*.

Sonata for Violoncello and Piano, Op.78

This sonata was probably also written for Alwin Schroeder. Composed probably in 1913, this piece is in sonata-allegro form. However, for Foote, within this form, third or closing themes are rare, slow introduction are infrequent, the recapitulation is seldom an exact repetition of the exposition, and final codas are often extensive and formally quite important. In this sonata, the first theme of the first movement is in an AABA' form, and the second theme is ABBA'. Foote's rhythms are generally regular, smooth, and flowing; phrases seldom dovetail, and syncopations rarely extend over a bar line.

Ai-Lin Hsieh's Dissertation Recital

Selected Works by **Ernest Bloch** (1880-1959)
Gildenhorn Recital Hall, May 1st, 2004

Program Notes

The Swiss-born American composer Ernest Bloch (1880-1959) is known for expressing Hebraic sentiments in his music derived from his Jewish identity, not just only from absorption of Hebraic folk elements. The composer once said: "I do not propose or desire to attempt a reconstruction of the music of the Jews....It is rather the Hebrew spirit that interests me, the complex, ardent, agitated soul that vibrates for me in the Bible...All this is in us, all this is in me, and it is the better part of me. It is all this that I endeavour to hear in myself and to transcribe in my music: the venerable emotion of the race that slumbers way down in our souls." This unique empathy was rapidly revealed to the public when his magnificent rhapsody *Schelomo* for cello and orchestra first performed during the First World War.

Meditation Hebraique (1924)

Composed in the same year with Bloch's better-known set: "*From Jewish Life*", this contemplative cello piece is also a Judaically tinged creation from the Cleveland years (1920-1925). Dedicated to the great cellist Pablo Casals, this piece is profoundly expressive in emotion by its plaintive and often-bittersweet chromatic melody, constructed by augmented seconds and quarter tones.

Suite No.1 for Violoncello Solo (1956)

This suite is one of the *Three Suites for Unaccompanied Cello* which he composed near the end of his life. Seriously ill with cancer, the composer turned to the purest genre of musical expression-- works for a single instrument unaccompanied. However, these cello suites are a lot more complex than his earlier cello pieces, and the structure simulates the J.S. Bach's cello solo suites. In particular, this suite is the closest to the Baroque-suite scheme--a Prelude, an Allegro, a Canzona, and a gigue-like finale in 6/8 meter.

Schelomo(1915-1916): Hebratic Rhapsody for Cello and Orchestra

After the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Bloch was increasingly urged to sketch a work for voice and orchestra based on the book of Ecclesiastes to express his grief for the pain of war. Bloch wrote his own program note for this work in 1933:

"This is the story of *Schelomo*. Towards the end of 1915 I was in Geneva. For years I had been sketching a musical setting of the Book of Ecclesiastes, but neither French, German, nor English suited my purpose and I did not know enough Hebrew. Consequently the sketches accumulated-and slept. One day I met the cellist Alexander Barjansky and his wife. I heard Barjansky play and immediately became his friend. I played him my manuscript works-the *Jewish Poems*, the *Israel Symphony*, and the *Psalms* -- all of which were then unpublished and had failed to arouse anyone's interest. The Barjanskys were profoundly moved. While I played,

Mme. Barjansky, who had borrowed a pencil and a piece of paper, sketched a little statue -- her 'sculptural thanks,' as she put it. At last, in my terrible loneliness, I had found true, warm friends. My hopes revived and I began to think about writing a work for that marvelous cellist. Why not use my *Ecclesiastes* material, but instead of a human voice, limited by a text, employ an infinitely grander and more profound voice that could speak all languages -- that of his violoncello? I took up my sketches, and without plan or program, almost without knowing where I was headed, I worked for days on my rhapsody. As each section was completed, I copied the solo part and Barjansky studied it. At the same time Mme. Barjansky worked on the statuette intended as a gift for me. She had first thought of sculpting a Christ, but later decided on a King Solomon. We both finished at about the same time. In a few weeks my *Ecclesiastes* was completed, and since the legend attributes this book to King Solomon, I gave it the title *Schelomo*."

Bloch later wrote again about this *Schelomo*: "I had no descriptive intention...If one likes, one may imagine that the voice of the solo cello is the voice of the King *Schelomo*. The complex voice of the orchestra is the voice of his age, his world, his experience...Even the darkest of my works ends with hope. This work alone concludes in a complete negation...."

Ai-Lin Hsieh's Dissertation Recital

Selected works by Ernest Bloch and Erich Wolfgang Korngold
Gildenhorn Recital Hall, March 19th, 2005

Program Notes

Ernest Bloch: *Voice in the Wilderness* (1936)

Part concerto, part symphonic poem, this six-movement piece for orchestra and violoncello obbligato flows without a break. Bloch himself once described this work as “a suite of pieces...in the nature of soliloquies—‘moods’—of a ‘prophetic tint.’” Although there are some rhythmic and motivic similarities with his earlier famous *Schelomo* (1915), a one-movement work, in which the soloist representing the monarch of King Solomon, *Voice in the Wilderness* employs the cello more as an expressive instrument than a mere virtuosic display. The title of the composition, in fact, is an afterthought, suggested by Carl Engel after he had listened to Bloch play the piece on piano at his house in the Haute-Savoie. While the composer himself seems to have intended no specific religious references, Engel felt that the music was “surcharged with religious fervor and prophetic eloquence.” This is pensive, at times lonely, meditated music that offers full range of emotions, from anguish and despair to exaltation and hope.

Ernest Bloch: *Suite No.3 for Solo Violoncello* (1956-57)

Suite No.3 returns to the shorter, simpler style of the first suite. It is cast in five movements: *Allegro deciso*, *Andante*, *Allegro*, *Andante*, and *Allegro giocoso*. As in the Suite No.1, the closing movement is notable for its dance-like gait.

Erich Wolfgang Korngold: *Concerto in C Major, Op.37 (in one movement)* (1946)

Born in the town of Brünn in Austria in 1897, Erich Wolfgang Korngold, who wrote his first symphony at the age of 11, was quickly recognized as the most exciting child prodigy since Mozart. In 1934, Korngold was invited by Max Reinhardt to Hollywood to work with his celebrated film of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and later became an American citizen in 1935. As he entered the film industry, Korngold introduced a new syntax of orchestral film score that featured huge, vibrant cues, brassy adventure themes, as well as tender and passionate romantic melodies. Such a stylistic innovation thus brought Hollywood's film music into its new era. Korngold, more than anyone else, deserves to be called the Father of the Modern Film Music.

This Cello Concerto was the result from the film called “Deception” (1946) -- a film set in New York, in the world of classical music starring Claude Rains as an egomaniac composer, Bette Davis his pupil and mistress and Paul Henreid, a cellist and her former lover returned from a concentration camp. Originally scored for six minutes long, it was so successful that Korngold expanded it to twelve minutes and published it as his Op.37 in 1950.