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## **Milken Archive of Jewish Music Virtual Museum Introduces Volume 11, Part 2**

### ***Two New Symphonic Albums by Bernstein, Bloch, Foss and More***

When the Editorial Board of the Milken Archive began deliberations about a volume on orchestral music of Jewish spirit, they had no idea how “voluminous” it would turn out to be. Later, when recording sessions began, musicians and conductors were equally surprised at the number of high-quality, Jewish-themed orchestral works—many by major American composers—that had been composed. Looking back with the 20/20 vision that hindsight allows, it’s equally surprising that so many of them fell more or less into obscurity.



The two new releases in Volume 11—featuring symphonic masterworks by Leonard Bernstein, Ernest Bloch, Lukas Foss, Mario Davidovsky, and Joel Hoffman—offer a remedy for this.

From Bernstein, a recording of his Symphony No. 1: “Jeremiah” featuring mezzo-soprano Helen Medlyn and the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra conducted by James Judd. Inspired by the biblical prophet’s premonitions of impending doom and destruction

for the people of Judea, its early performances led many critics to dub it the best new work of the year (1944). In addition to its ingenious use of Judaic material, it also displays the intensesness and highly charged energy that characterizes much of Bernstein's trademark.

Works by Bernstein contemporary Lukas Foss (whose works Bernstein often conducted) and electronic music pioneer Mario Davidovsky explore the Song of Songs with settings for orchestra and voice. The Foss recording features mezzo-soprano Jennie Tourel; soprano Susan Narucki performs on the Davidovsky. Predating his more experimental phase, Foss's setting bears traces of neoclassicism throughout. (Foss also pays tribute to the Renaissance Italian-Jewish composer Salamone Rossi with a suite of Baroque-inspired instrumental settings.) The Davidovsky settings, titled *Shulamit's Dream*, are stark, shocking, and dramatic—more in the vein of a miniature opera.

Ernest Bloch once remarked that his “Jewish” works were inspired by an “inner voice” rather than any external sources—which is to say that he approached “Jewish” music more as an expression of personal identity than an exploration putative Jewish modes and rhythms. Hear his unique approach on two fantastic performances featuring the legendary Zina Schiff on violin. Named after the moniker of the founder of the Hassidic movement (Baal Shem Tov: Owner of a Good Name), *Baal Shem: Three Pictures of Hassidic Life* draws on prayer melodies and niggunim (ecstatic melodies) to convey the spirit of Hassidic devotion and commitment. From a later period, *Suite Hebraique* was composed as a token of appreciation for Chicago's Covenant Club (founded in 1917 for Eastern European Jews), which had sponsored a festival in honor of the composer's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Joel Hoffman's cello concerto, *Self-Portrait with Gebirtig*, explores the ins and outs of the Eastern European tradition of the klezmer. Using melodies from three songs by the famous Polish-Jewish poet and songwriter Mordechai Gebirtig, Hoffman has crafted a work of stunning character and charm that is by turns moving, poignant, and just plain fun.

In an exclusive video documentary also featured in the volume, Hoffman comments on the difficulties surrounding the performance of orchestral works: “Like so many composers who've been lucky enough to have performances of orchestral pieces, I was one of the many composers who also suffered the problem of having many orchestra pieces being played once.” To what extent Jewish-themed orchestral music might become a more common part of the standard repertoire cannot be foreseen. For now, great works like these have a permanent home in the Milken Archive of Jewish Music: The American Experience.

Founded in 1990 by philanthropist Lowell Milken, the Milken Archive of Jewish Music reflects the scope and variety of Jewish life in America. The Archive's virtual museum [www.milkenarchive.org](http://www.milkenarchive.org) is an interactive guide to music, videos, oral histories, photos and essays.

***For information or interviews, contact [media@milkenarchive.org](mailto:media@milkenarchive.org).***

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