

Ernest Bloch – Piano Quintets (2007)

Written by bluesever

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1. *Piano Quintet No.1 - I. Agitato*
2. *Piano Quintet No.1 - II. Andante mistico*
3. *Piano Quintet No.1 - III. Allegro energico*
4. *Night (for string quartet)*
5. *Paysages - 1. North: Molto moderato*
6. *Paysages - 2. Alpestre: Allegretto*
7. *Paysages - 3. Tongataboo: Allegro*
8. *Two Pieces for String Quartet - 1. Andante moderato*
9. *Two Pieces for String Quartet - 2. Allegro molto*
10. *Piano Quintet No.2 - I. Animato*
11. *Piano Quintet No.2 - II. Andante*
12. *Piano Quintet No.2 - III. Allegro*

Piers Lane, piano
Goldner String Quartet

Swiss-American composer Ernest Bloch is best known for his works on Jewish themes and subjects -- Baal Shem, Schelomo, the Israel Symphony -- but the majority of his works are abstract, if heavily accented music written in the standard late nineteenth century central European harmonies and forms. This 2007 Hyperion disc features two large-scale chamber works by Bloch, his three-movement piano quintets from 1923 and 1957, plus three shorter pieces for string quartet alone: *Night* and *Paysages* (Landscapes) both from 1923 and *Two Pieces* from 1938 and 1950. Over his long career, while his themes grew more concentrated, his harmonies more austere and his forms more focused, Bloch's tonal rhetoric and dramatic developments remained deeply rooted in the late Romanticism of his youth. Though written more than 20 years apart, his piano quintets are prime examples of this. Both are three-movement works with heroic themes surging above driven harmonies in the fast outer movements and ecstatic themes soaring above restless harmonies in the central slow

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movements. Played with immense conviction by the Goldner String Quartet with pianist Piers Lane, these performances reveal both the fundamental unity and the inevitable sharpening of Bloch's style. The intensity of the quartets' tone, the way they bring out the expressive nuances of the string writing, is quite persuasive on its own, and when coupled with the power and flexibility of Lane's piano playing in the quintets, it is wholly compelling. For a taste of Bloch, try either the evocative Night or the exciting "Tongatboo" from Paysages. For the best of Bloch, try the beautifully extended slow coda to the Second Piano Quintet. For the full Bloch immersion, start with the blustery Agitato that opens the first First Piano Quintet and don't stop until the blissful end of the Second Piano Quintet. ---James Leonard, Rovi

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