

The Kapralova Society Journal

A Journal of Women in Music



Special points of interest:

Amy Beach
(1867-1944)

Inside this issue:

Mrs. H.H.A. Beach: American Symphonist / by Eugene Gates	1
CD releases	8, 11
Hudbaby: CD Review / by Michelle Latour	11
New publication	12

MRS. H. H. A. BEACH: AMERICAN SYMPHONIST

Eugene Gates

Mrs. H. H. A. Beach (1867-1944) was the leading American woman composer of her generation. At a time when musically gifted women were expected to restrict their creative efforts to the production of vocal and piano music for performance in the parlors of cultivated homes or for use as teaching material, she enjoyed an enormously successful career as a composer of large-scale art music. Like most of her contemporaries, Mrs. Beach wrote many songs and piano pieces, but her prolific output also includes a symphony (the first to be composed and published by an American woman), a concert mass, cantatas, a piano concerto, an opera, and several extended chamber works. A devout Episcopalian, she also composed a substantial amount of very fine church music. Included among her works in this category are anthems, motets, a complete Communion Service, a *Te Deum*, and a setting of St. Francis's *Canticle of the Sun*.¹

A descendent of early colonial settlers, Mrs. Beach (Amy Marcy Cheney) was born in Henniker, New Hampshire, on September 5, 1867. The only child of paper manufacturer and importer Charles Abbott Cheney and Clara Imogene Marcy Cheney, Amy showed signs of exceptional musical talent at a very early age. She received her first musical instruction from her mother, who was an excellent pianist and singer.² In a letter to one of her relatives, Mrs. Cheney discussed her daughter's prodigious talent and early training as follows:

She commenced the study of piano with me at the age of six. I was compelled to do so as she played the piano

at four years, memorizing everything that she heard correctly in four-part harmony as in the hymn tunes she heard in church, after one hearing and always in the same key in which they were written. Her gift for composition showed itself in babyhood—before she was two years old she would, when being rocked to sleep in my arms, improvise a perfectly correct alto to any soprano air I might sing. She played, while under my instruction, at a few concerts when seven years old, her repertoire including Beethoven sonatas, op. 19, 1 and 2, Chopin, Waltz in E-flat, op. 18, Handel, *Harp and Lute* . . . and many other works from the old masters. In response to encores she would play one of her own compositions with the most unconscious manner imaginable.³

At the age of four, while visiting her grandfather's farm in Maine, Amy composed her first music: "Mama's Waltz," "Snowflake Waltz," and "Marlborough Waltz." When she returned home and told her mother that she had "made" three waltzes, Mrs. Cheney did not believe her at first, since there was no piano within miles of the farm. Amy then explained that she had written them in her head, and proved it by playing them on the piano.⁴

In 1871, the Cheney family moved from Henniker to Boston. When Amy was eight, her parents had her talents assessed by several of Boston's foremost musicians, and the consensus was that she would be immediately accepted by any of the great European conservatories.⁵ However, after careful consideration, her parents decided to send her to W. L. Whittemore's private school in Boston to complete her general education. Her piano studies were continued under the guidance of Ernst Perabo

Mrs. H.H. Beach:

and Carl Baermann.⁶

There is little wonder that her piano teachers considered Amy the greatest musical prodigy in America.⁷ Gifted with absolute pitch and an extraordinary musical memory, she was able to reproduce accurately an entire Beethoven sonata without ever having seen the score, after hearing one of her fellow students practise it.⁸

The disparity between the tuition Amy Cheney received in piano and her formal education in music theory is of considerable interest. She studied piano for ten years with the finest teachers in Boston, but her theoretical training consisted of only one year of harmony and counterpoint with Junius W. Hill, in 1881-82. In 1884, her parents sought the advice of Wilhelm Gericke, the newly appointed conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, about the further development of her creative talent. A recent arrival from his native Austria, Gericke told the Cheneys that Amy should teach herself composition and orchestration by studying the works of the great masters. Such advice, of course, reflected the prevailing belief that a young woman had no need for intensive theoretical training because she would never create music of any significant value.⁹

Against all odds, Amy succeeded in doing exactly what Gericke had recommended. Through diligent and systematic study, she attained a complete theoretical background without the benefit of formal instruction. Many years later, she described how she had mastered the intricacies of fugal composition by memorizing and analyzing Bach fugues:

I learned the fugue form by writing out much of the *Well Tempered Clavichord*, from memory, voice for voice. Then I compared what I had set down with what Bach had written. The points where my voices crossed differently from Bach's, indicated valuable lessons!¹⁰

She taught herself orchestration in the same way.

I have never gone to a concert hall simply for enjoyment or pastime; I have always tried to study the works, in their structure as well as their interpretation, and to bring home with me something I did not know before. In listening to symphonies, I acquainted myself thoroughly with the individual tone and color possibilities of each instrument; with the effect of these different colors on the various themes. When I got home, then, I would sit down and write out the themes I could remember, with their proper instrumentation. Then I compared my work with the score.¹¹

To assist her study of orchestration, she also translated the treatises of Berlioz and Gevaert, neither of which had yet

been published in English.¹²

Amy Cheney's first published composition, a song entitled *The Rainy Day*, was issued by the Oliver Ditson Company in 1883, when she was only fifteen. On October 24 of the same year, she made her debut as a professional pianist, playing Chopin's Rondo in E-flat and Moscheles' Concerto in G minor with an orchestra conducted by Adolf Neuendorff at the Boston Music Hall.¹³ The Boston correspondent of the *New York Tribune* reported that "she played with all the intelligence of a master."¹⁴ Other critics praised her superb touch, mastery of the instrument, and artistic finish.¹⁵

A series of highly successful recitals followed, and on March 28, 1885, she made her first appearance with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. On this occasion, she played Chopin's Concerto in F minor.¹⁶ Impressed with her "thoroughly artistic, beautiful and brilliant performance," a reviewer for the *Boston Evening Transcript* wrote that she played "with a totality of conception that one seldom finds in players of her sex."¹⁷ A few months later, she gained further critical acclaim for her performance of Mendelssohn's Concerto in D minor with the Theodore Thomas Orchestra at the Music Hall.¹⁸ The fact that she was the first Bostonian to achieve such success as a pianist without European training was a source of great local pride.¹⁹

On December 2, 1885, at the age of eighteen, Amy Cheney married Dr. Henry Harris Aubrey Beach, a wealthy, socially prominent surgeon and member of the faculty of Harvard Medical School, and took the name she used for the rest of her life—Mrs. H. H. A. Beach. A widower twenty-five years her senior, Dr. Beach was an accomplished amateur singer and pianist who had seriously considered a musical career in his youth. His knowledge of music was comprehensive, and he enjoyed the respect and friendship of many of Boston's most important musicians and intellectual leaders.²⁰

Although her childless marriage—which, by all accounts, was a happy one—provided Amy Beach with a comfortable life unimpeded by financial worries, it also interrupted the momentum of her concert career. For the next quarter of a century, she gave only a few concerts per season, usually consisting of her own works, and always for the benefit of some charitable cause. Commenting on this several years after her husband's death, she explained:

Dr. Beach was "old-fashioned" and believed that a husband should support his wife. But he did not want me to drop my music, in fact, urged me to keep on, with the stipulation that any fees I received should go to charity. So hospitals, charities, institutions and similar organiza-

American Symphonist

tions all were the recipients. I was happy and Dr. Beach was content.²¹

Dr. Beach was very proud of his wife's musical achievements, and felt that her future lay in composition.²² He encouraged her creative endeavours in every possible way, and used the influence of his position to promote her composing career.²³ Amy Beach admired her husband's highly developed critical sense, and once said that he and her mother were "the kindest, most helpful, and most merciless critics" she ever had.²⁴

In 1885, the year of her marriage, the Boston music publisher Arthur P. Schmidt, a great champion of American women composers, began to bring out Amy Beach's works. Given the extent to which the philosophical and scientific discourses of the day were mobilized to discredit women's creative abilities in music, it is fortunate that there were always at least a few critics and publishers who did not share the widely held belief that women were innately incapable of producing great works. Schmidt was one such publisher. His role as a promoter of American women's music must be viewed in the wider context of his championing of American art music in general, at a time when the American musical scene was dominated by German music and German musicians. His dedication to American music was all the more remarkable in light of the fact that he was German born and trained. Because German music then reigned supreme in the United States, Schmidt's support was enormously helpful to all American composers; but to women composers, who were doubly handicapped by being both American and women, it was virtually essential. Between 1885 and 1944, Beach composed more than 300 works; Schmidt issued over 200 of them.²⁵

In 1886, at the age of nineteen, Beach began to compose her first large-scale work—the Mass in E-flat, for soloists, chorus, orchestra, and organ—completing it in 1889. Published as her op. 5, the Mass was first performed on February 7, 1892, by the Handel and Haydn Society of Boston under the direction of Carl Zerrahn. Beach joined the choir and orchestra on the stage for the second half of the program, playing the piano part of Beethoven's *Choral Fantasy*.²⁶

The premiere of Amy Beach's Mass was an important event in the history of American music for two reasons: the Mass itself is a powerful, beautifully constructed work, and it was the first composition by a woman to be given by the oldest, most conservative musical organization in the country.²⁷ The performance was an unqualified success, and both the audience and chorus lavished tributes on the young composer. The *Boston Herald* reported:

When Mrs. Beach entered the hall, leaning upon the arm of Secretary Stone, she was greeted with rising honours, in which the chorus and audience generally joined, the ladies of the society waving their handkerchiefs, while the sterner sex made a more noisy demonstration of their recognition of the triumph of the young composer. Mrs. Beach bowed her acknowledgements in her own gracious fashion, and was subsequently well-nigh hidden from view by the offerings to her genius in the form of elaborate floral tributes.²⁸

On the whole, the reviews were favourable. The music critic of *Book News* wrote:

It is certainly a proud feather in Boston's cap that a woman, a young woman too, . . . has succeeded in conquering such difficulties of composition as a polyphonic work of that magnitude involves, and producing a masterpiece of beauty and originality.²⁹

The *New York Sun* said: "Mrs. Beach is the first woman in America to compose a work of so much power and beauty."³⁰ While the quiet, lyrical sections of the Mass were unanimously praised, however, some reviewers complained that the bolder, more vigorous movements were "unfeminine." A critic for the *Musical Herald*, for instance, said that the Mass was "well worth the study of those who decry the ability of women in the field of music," but found the "bold free style" of the *Quoniam* section "difficult to associate with a woman's hand."³¹ Rupert Hughes described the Mass as a "work of force and daring,"³² adding, however, that "when I say that Mrs. Beach's work is markedly virile, I do not mean it as a compliment unalloyed."³³ Like many other critics of the period, Hughes believed that women who wrote large-scale orchestral and choral works were "seeking after virility."³⁴ In their misguided attempts to emulate men, he asserted, they often produced scores that were overly boisterous.³⁵ According to Hughes, female composers were most successful when they channelled their creative energy into writing delicate, melodious songs—"such music as women best understand, and therefore ought to make best."³⁶

Despite the enthusiastic reception accorded the Mass at its premiere, it did not receive another complete performance during the composer's lifetime. However, it was probably as a result of the initial success of this work that Beach received her first two commissions. Mrs. Carl Alves, who had sung the contralto solos in the Mass, wrote Beach a week later requesting that she compose a "grand dramatic aria." A setting of the monologue *Eilende Wolken* from Schiller's *Mary Stuart*, the aria was first performed on December 2, 1892, by Mrs. Alves and

Mrs. H.H. Beach:

the Symphony Society of New York under the direction of Walter Damrosch. It was the first work by a woman composer to be presented by that orchestra.³⁷

Amy Beach also received a commission from the Board of Lady Managers in charge of the construction of and events to take place in the Women's Building at the Columbian Exposition (World's Fair) in Chicago in 1893.³⁸ Two other women were also invited to compose works for the dedication ceremonies—Ingeborg von Bronsart of Weimar, Germany, and Frances Ellicott of London. They both contributed orchestral pieces while Beach wrote, in only six weeks, the *Festival Jubilate*, op. 17. It was performed by a choir of 300, soloists and orchestra under the baton of Theodore Thomas on May 1, 1893.³⁹ W. Waugh Lauder of the *Musical Courier* said of the work: "It was thoroughly scholastic . . . the success of the afternoon. It made a deep and satisfying impression, and gave official seal to woman's capabilities in music."⁴⁰ Comments such as the above show clearly that composing music on a grand scale was still regarded as an inherently masculine province. Indeed, for many, Beach was the notable exception which proved the rule that women could not write successfully in the larger forms.

In January of 1894, Amy Beach began composing her most ambitious and extensive work, the *Gaelic Symphony*, op. 32. Completed in the spring of 1896, the four-movement work was inspired by a collection of Gaelic folk tunes. Beach later explained:

Their simple, rugged and unpretentious beauty led me to try to develop their ideas in symphonic form. The work was so fascinating that I decided to systematize it seriously, and the *Gaelic* symphony is the result. Most of the themes are actual quotations from this collection of folk music and those which are original I have tried to keep in the same idiom and spirit.⁴¹

The premiere of the *Gaelic Symphony* took place on October 30, 1896, with Emil Pauer conducting the Boston Symphony Orchestra. During the next twenty years or so, the work was presented in New York, Brooklyn, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Kansas City, Detroit, Buffalo, Minneapolis, San Francisco, Leipzig and Hamburg.

Although concert audiences received the Symphony warmly wherever it was played, the press notices, particularly those of the early performances, were mixed. As was the case with Beach's Mass, much of the criticism (both favourable and unfavourable) invoked the double standard of sexual aesthetics—the tendency of critics to evaluate a woman's works not on their artistic merit alone, but on the extent to which they conformed to the prevailing stereotypes of ideal femininity. The *Musical Courier*

condemned the Symphony for its false virility, but grudgingly conceded that the graceful second movement was appropriately feminine:

In its efforts to be Gaelic and masculine [Mrs. Beach's symphony] end[s] in being monotonous and spasmodic. . . . Of grace and delicacy there are evidences in the Siciliana, and here she is at her best, 'But yet a woman.'⁴²

Philip Hale of the *Boston Sunday Journal* was generally enthusiastic about the work, but felt that Beach's orchestration was at times excessively heavy. He attributed this defect to a generalized tendency among women composers: "Here she is eminently feminine. A woman who writes for orchestra thinks, 'I must be virile at all cost.'"⁴³ A critic for the *Brooklyn Standard Union*, on the other hand, praised the Symphony for its masculine strength and energy, implying that the composer had overcome the limitations of her sex: "This symphony is one of her most ambitious works and is truly able. There is nothing feminine about the writing; all her work is strong and brilliant."⁴⁴ Ironically, Beach's friend, the composer George Chadwick, apparently found only feminine virtues in the work. According to an article in *Etude*,

[w]hen Mr. George Whitfield Chadwick first heard Mrs. Beach's symphony, 'Gaelic,' he is said to have exclaimed: "Why was not I born a woman?" It was the delicacy and finish in her musical expression that had struck him, an expression of true womanhood, absolute in its sincerity.⁴⁵

In sum, whatever the merits or defects of the symphony were thought to be, critics went to extraordinary lengths in their attempts to relate them to the composer's sex.

Amy Beach's next big work, the Sonata in A minor for Violin and Piano, op. 34, was composed in the six weeks following the completion of her Symphony. It was first performed in Boston in January of 1897 by Franz Kneisel with Beach at the piano. The same artists played it again in Boston, in New York, and at a university concert in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Beach performed the work several times with other violinists as well. It was also played in Berlin by Karl Halir and Teresa Carreño, in Paris by Eugene Ysaye and Raoul Pugno, and in London by Sigmund Beel and Henry Bird.⁴⁶ The reviews were laudatory. William J. Henderson of the *New York Times* wrote:

Mrs. Beach deserves well of her countrymen, for she has proved that it is possible for a woman to compose music which is worthy of serious attention. This cannot

American Symphonist

be said of many women composers, and in this country Mrs. Beach stands almost alone.⁴⁷

A critic for *Etude* praised the Sonata in the language of sexual aesthetics: "This work is most excellent, feminine in respect to sentiment, but worked out in a broad and masterful spirit worthy of a man in his best moments."⁴⁸ It is important to note, however, that the writer invoked a whole set of gendered criteria that were never used in evaluating the works of Beach's male colleagues.

Despite the existence of a double standard—one for serious musicians, and the other for dilettantes, with women musicians, particularly composers, automatically placed in the latter category—the success of Beach's Sonata and that of her Symphony led to the further acceptance of her works as worthy of performance on their own merit, rather than merely as curiosities.⁴⁹ It was also at this point in her career that the critics stopped making Beach the target of sexual aesthetics. It seems likely that the maturity and structural strength of her large-scale compositions had worked toward eroding the deleterious effects of this gender-biased system of criticism. The growing influence of feminism probably played a significant role as well.

In 1898, Beach was invited to become a regular contributor to the women's page of *Etude*, an invitation she declined because she was too busy with her career. She also felt that women composers could do more for their cause by sticking to their art than they could through literary efforts. She wrote:

My time is entirely devoted, of necessity, to the exacting requirements of musical composition, with sufficient piano practice to admit of occasional public appearances. This leaves me no time in which to do literary work. . . . In the best interests of those of my sex who are working in the field of musical composition, I believe that they can be advanced more rapidly and with greater certainty, not through their efforts as *littérateurs*, but by solid practical work that can be printed, played, or sung.⁵⁰

In June of that year, Beach's *Song of Welcome*, op. 42, a commissioned work for chorus and orchestra, was performed at the opening ceremonies of the Trans-Mississippi Exposition in Omaha, Nebraska, and in the fall her cantata *The Rose of Avontown* was presented at the Worcester Festival.⁵¹

In 1900, Amy Beach completed her Piano Concerto in C-sharp minor, op. 45, dedicated to her friend Teresa Carreño. On April 6 of the same year, Wilhelm Gericke conducted the Boston Symphony Orchestra in the premiere of the Concerto, with Beach as soloist. A showpiece for both

piano and orchestra, the four-movement work was a resounding success, and was later performed by Beach in Chicago, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Berlin, Hamburg and Leipzig.⁵² Reviewing the premiere, a critic for the *Boston Saturday Evening Gazette* wrote:

It is a most carefully considered and carefully wrought-out work. It is modern in spirit, it is full of striking passages and bold and effective in modulations, and the technical knowledge everywhere displayed is of a high and sometimes of a daring character. . . . The piano part is very difficult, but it was played by Mrs. Beach with grasp, ease, effectiveness and brilliancy.⁵³

Historian and critic Louis C. Elson later said of the Concerto: "The finale is powerful enough to make any critic, who does not believe that women can create music, become rather doubtful about his position."⁵⁴

The next extended work to come from Amy Beach's pen was her Quintet for Piano and Strings in F-sharp minor, op. 67. It was played for the first time in February of 1908 by Beach and the Hoffman Quartet at Potter Hall in Boston.⁵⁵ The composer later performed it in New York, Munich, and various other cities. A critic for the *Musical Courier* said of the Quintet:

While the whole work has strong individuality and reveals features of unusual skill and resource, the second movement . . . stands out especially, its many passages of exquisite beauty, its rich coloring and its absolute control of idiom and tonal effects revealing the hand of a composer of striking and patent attainments.⁵⁶

The death of Beach's husband in June of 1910, and that of her mother seven months later, brought an end to the most productive period of her creative life. She later told an interviewer:

After the deaths of my husband and mother, one blow following the other so soon, it seemed to me as though I could not work, at least in public. Even in private to hear the music I adored wrung my heart for a while.⁵⁷

In 1911, after a year of inactivity, Beach left for Europe to recover from her double loss. Her first year abroad was one of almost entire rest, but in 1912, she gradually began to rebuild her performing career.⁵⁸ Writing from Germany, she confided her plans for the future to her publisher Arthur P. Schmidt:

I am not trying to play in a large number of concerts this season, as it is fatiguing, with the necessary travelling,

Mrs. H.H. Beach:

etc. and I am not yet very strong, as the new life is hard and exhausting to me in many ways, as you can understand. But I shall try to make each appearance of benefit to me in future American tours, if I can carry out my present plan of making some of these in coming years. Even a limited number of European appearances will help at home, as you know.⁵⁹

Between 1912 and 1914, Beach gave recitals of her works and those of other composers in several German cities. She also accompanied local artists in Dresden, Breslau and Munich in performances of her Quintet, Violin Sonata, and many of her songs. With the Berlin Philharmonic, and the orchestras of Leipzig and Hamburg, she appeared as soloist in her Piano Concerto. Her *Gaelic Symphony* was also performed in Leipzig and Hamburg.⁶⁰

Audiences and critics throughout Germany were captivated by Amy Beach both as a pianist and as a composer. The following review of the Hamburg performance of her Symphony and Concerto is but one example of the many tributes paid to her by the German press. What is striking about this review, apart from its praise of Beach's work, is the fact that it draws attention to the widespread prejudice against women composers that existed at the time. In the *Hamburger Nachrichten* of December 3, 1913, we read:

Should women compose? Are their creative efforts justified by adequate creative gifts? This question may readily be answered in the affirmative. . . . One need only mention the names of Amelie Nikisch⁶¹ and Amy Beach in order to refute this foolish prejudice concerning women composers. Amy Beach came to Hamburg with a symphony and a piano concerto; that is to say, she came before us as a composer of the largest art forms of instrumental music. . . . The works performed here yesterday demonstrated . . . that we have before us undeniably a possessor of musical gifts of the highest kind; a musical nature touched with genius. Strong creative power, glowing fancy, instinct for form and color are united in her work with facile and effortless mastery of the entire technical apparatus.⁶²

The success of Amy Beach's works in Germany served to enhance her already enviable reputation in her own country. Beach attached considerable importance to her European experience, and once told a reporter:

The wonderful thing for the American musician going to Europe is to find music put on a so much higher plane than in America, and universally recognized and respected by all classes and conditions as the great art which it is. There is indeed such a tremendous respect for music in Europe that it is almost impossible to convey this feeling to persons who have never been outside of America. Mu-

sic is in the air constantly, wherever one goes.⁶³

In 1914, Beach returned home with a full schedule of concert engagements already booked, and in 1915 settled in New York. Thereafter, she concertized widely throughout North America during the winter months, and devoted the summers to composing at her cottage in Centerville, on Cape Cod. (The cottage was entirely paid for with royalties from one of her songs—*Ecstasy*, written in 1893.) From 1921 onward, she also spent part of each summer at the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire, where she wrote many of her works.⁶⁴ Among them were numerous songs and piano pieces, a *String Quartet in One Movement* based on Eskimo themes (sketched at the Colony, and completed in Rome during the winter of 1929-30), the one-act opera *Cabildo* (1932), and her last big chamber work—a Trio for Piano, Violin and Cello (1938). Other extended compositions dating from the second half of her career include the Variations for Flute and String Quartet (1920), and the cantatas *Canticle of the Sun* (1928) and *Christ in the Universe* (1931).

In a letter to John Tasker Howard, Beach discussed the advantages she saw in having a double career as both performer and composer:

I have literally lived the life of two people, one a pianist, the other a writer. Anything more unlike than the state of mind demanded by these two professions I could not imagine! When I do one kind of work, I shut the other up in a closed room and lock the door, unless I happen to be composing for the piano, in which case there is a connecting link. One great advantage, however, in this kind of life, is that one never grows stale, but there is always a continual interest and freshness from the change back and forth.⁶⁵

A kind and generous person, Amy Beach used her musical and social status to further the careers of many younger artists, and by her example and encouragement, paved the way for other women composers.⁶⁶ In 1924, she co-founded and became first president of the Society of American Women Composers—an organization dedicated to the advancement of music written by women.⁶⁷ In advising young women who aspired to a musical career, she stressed above all else the importance of acquiring a strong technique:

One thing I have learned from my audiences is that young women artists and composers shouldn't be afraid to pitch right in and try. If they think they have something to say, let them say it. But let them be sure to build a technique with which to say it. The technique mustn't be visible, but

American Symphonist

it must be there.⁶⁸

Beach's personal views on the status of women composers seem rather conflicted. In a 1915 interview with Edwin Hughes, she said:

I have personally never felt myself handicapped in any way, nor have I encountered prejudice of any sort on account of my being a woman, and I believe that the field for musical composition in America offers the same prospects to young women as to young men composers.⁶⁹

The fact that she was instrumental in founding the Society of American Women Composers, however, suggests that she saw a need for greater performance opportunities for women in the profession.

For her contribution to American music, Beach received many tributes and honours from music clubs and societies, and in 1928, she was awarded an honorary Master of Arts from the University of New Hampshire.⁷⁰ She was forced to abandon her concert career in the late 1930s because of failing health, but continued to compose until her death in 1944 at the age of seventy-seven.⁷¹

When and if Amy Beach is mentioned in music history textbooks, she is linked to the group of composers known as the New England Traditionalists—John Knowles Paine (1839-1906), Arthur Foote (1853-1937), Horatio Parker (1863-1919), George W. Chadwick (1854-1931), and Edward MacDowell (1861-1908)—although she worked apart from them. Her early compositions, with their broadly spun-out melodies, lush chromaticism, rich textures, restless modulations, and complex development of themes, are in the late Romantic tradition. Her harmonic language reflects the influence of Brahms and Wagner, but the lyricism, passion and vitality are unmistakably her own. Although Beach's general style did not change significantly over the years, some of her later compositions—the String Quartet, and the Piano Trio, for example—are somewhat leaner in texture, and suggest the influence of French Impressionism. Several of her instrumental works (the *Gaelic Symphony*, Suite for Two Pianos, String Quartet, and *Variations on Baltic Themes* for piano) draw their inspiration from folk tunes—a popular turn-of-the-century device. She also anticipated Olivier Messiaen by transcribing the calls of songbirds for thematic use. Bird calls are quoted in two of her piano pieces: *A Hermit Thrush at Eve*, and *A Hermit Thrush at Morn*, op. 92. Throughout her career, Beach composed numerous songs and character pieces for piano, but her creative

talent was best suited to works of larger scale. She once told an interviewer, “I love to work in the large forms, they are just as easy if not easier for me than the small ones.”⁷²

Compared to most women composers of her time, Amy Beach seems to have led a charmed life, for she did not have to fight unduly to achieve her goals. She received abundant emotional and financial support from her parents in her youth, and from her husband during the twenty-five years of her marriage. In later years, another important source of support came from the National Federation of Music Clubs. Founded in the late 1890s, the Federation sponsored concerts, and also promoted the study of works by European and American composers. Beach was nothing less than a heroine to the many women members of the Federation. They chose her works as required pieces for competitions, organized all-Beach recitals, and in some instances even named their clubs after her.⁷³

Not only did Beach receive considerable support from other women, but her career was also helped along by the gains of the women's rights movement. As Judith Tick reminds us:

The emergence of the woman composer in the 1890s is directly related to the effectiveness of the women's rights movement in redefining women's place. The movement . . . challenged belief in the creative inferiority of women in music, as it did in other spheres of intellectual life.⁷⁴

Another factor which contributed to Beach's great success was her long business association with Arthur P. Schmidt, a publisher strongly committed to the promotion of American music, and to equal rights for women composers. After she moved to New York, several other firms also began publishing her compositions. Only two of her larger works, the String Quartet and the opera *Cabildo*, remained unpublished during her lifetime—an extraordinary record for any American composer.

But this does not mean that Beach encountered no prejudice because of her sex. Clearly, despite her protestations to the contrary, she did—at least in her student years and during the early part of her career. As a student, she was left to her own devices to acquire the theoretical training she needed in order to compose—a situation that would probably have been handled quite differently had she been a boy.

Furthermore, the question of whether women were capable of creating large-scale works was a hotly debated issue at the beginning of Beach's career, and her first critics seldom let anyone forget that she was a woman. As several of the reviews cited in this article show, her largest and most powerful compositions—the Mass and the *Gaelic Symphony*—were frequently judged by the extent to which they were perceived to conform to prevailing stereotypes of



Virginia Eskin



Stephanie Chase

Virginia Eskin, a California native and long-time Boston resident, is a remarkably versatile solo pianist and chamber player, known for both standard classical repertoire and ragtime. A long-time champion of the works of American and European women composers, she has recently created and hosted 'First Ladies of Music,' a 13-program radio series sponsored by Northeastern University and produced by WFMT Chicago, carried by over 100 radio stations in the United States and abroad.

Stephanie Chase resides in New York City. Concert tours in twenty-five countries have brought Stephanie Chase international recognition and include appearances as soloist with the world's most distinguished orchestras, among which are the New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony, London Philharmonic, Atlanta Symphony, and San Francisco Symphony.

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Aaron Green, *About.com*

The piano and violin-and-piano music here is richly melodic, highly chromatic, and bursting with invention.

Jack Sullivan, *American Record Guide*

Kaprálová's music displays a remarkable mastery of form and harmony, and radiates youthful spontaneity, lyrical tenderness, and passionate intensity.

Edith Eisler, *Strings Magazine*

Kaprálová was one of the major female composers in history, despite her short time on earth; this Koch disc does her music considerable justice and serves as a strong introduction to Kaprálová's music.

Dave Louis, *Allmusic.com*

I have no doubt that this release will not only please Kaprálová's enthusiasts but also add many others to her following.

Věroslav Němec, *Harmonie*

Add this to your select discography of a composer whose early death deprived Czechoslovakia of a burgeoning talent.

Jonathan Woolf, *Musicweb.uk*

ideal femininity. Consequently, she was censured for her “inappropriate” virility. Paradoxically, when her large-scale compositions were deemed a success, it was often said that she had transcended the limitations of her sex, or that she had written “like a man.” Although contemporaneous critics believed that this was the highest praise they could offer a woman symphonist, such evaluations were often seen as proof that women who excelled at composition did so at great expense to their femininity. So prevalent was this notion, that Louis C. Elson—a critic more kindly disposed toward creative women than many of his colleagues—felt compelled to write in 1904: “To those who believe that women who achieve greatness in any art or science must be masculine in mind and manner, unsexed phenomena, we may say that Mrs. Beach is most womanly in all her ways.”⁷⁵

Fortunately, Beach did not have to contend with the deleterious effects of sexual aesthetics throughout her entire career; once her success had been firmly established, the critics began to evaluate her music on equal terms with that of her male colleagues. Nonetheless, the early critiques of her large-scale works demonstrate clearly the social tensions that the woman composer encountered on her journey from the parlor to the professional world of music as serious art—a world traditionally dominated by men.⁷⁶

The first American woman to write successfully in the larger forms, Amy Beach is a central figure in the history of women in music. After several decades of unjust neglect—a performance record that makes no sense—many of her works have recently been revived, and she is at last beginning to be acknowledged as one of the finest American composers of her time.⁷⁷ Some modern critics consider her *Gaelic Symphony* to be the first symphony of importance written by any American composer,⁷⁸ while others have suggested that her Piano Concerto could become a welcome alternative to those of Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff as a repertoire piece.⁷⁹ The Mass in E-flat, the *Canticle of the Sun*, the Violin Sonata, the Quintet, and the Piano Trio are also among Beach’s most distinguished works. They are beautifully crafted, and can hold their own in any age. When the Quintet was reintroduced by pianist Mary Louise Boehm in 1974, Paul Hume, music critic of the *Washington Post*, wrote:

Where has this music been all its life? Why has it never been heard while performances of quintets that are no better are played annually? If the answer is not that the composer was a woman, I would be fascinated to hear it.⁸⁰

Now that she has been rediscovered, is Amy Beach about to take her rightful place as a major figure in the history of American music? Time alone will tell, but at least—

aided by feminism and the rebirth of interest in late Romantic music—she is finally being given her chance.

NOTES

1. For a complete catalogue of Beach’s works, see Adrienne Fried Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian: The Life and Work of an American Composer 1867-1944* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 300-312.
2. Christine Ammer, *Unsung: A History of Women in American Music* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980), 76.
3. Mrs. Cheney to her cousin Anna, 27 April 1898, quoted in Adrienne Fried Block, “Why Amy Beach Succeeded as a Composer: The Early Years,” *Current Musicology* 36 (1983): 42.
4. “How Mrs. Beach Did Her First Composing,” *Musical America*, 8 August 1914, clipping file on Amy Beach, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center.
5. Agnes Lockhart Hughes, “Mrs. H. H. A. Beach: America’s Foremost Woman Composer,” *Summons*, October 1911, clipping file, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center.
6. *Notable American Women 1607-1950: A Biographical Dictionary*, 1971 ed., s. v. “Beach, Amy Marcy Cheney,” by Dena J. Epstein (hereafter cited as Epstein).
7. Louis C. Elson, *The History of American Music* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1971; a reprint of the 1925 edition), 298.
8. Arthur Elson, *Woman’s Work in Music* (Boston: L. C. Page, 1903), 197-98.
9. Adrienne Fried Block, jacket notes to *Our Musical Past*, Vol. 4: Mrs. H. H. A. Beach, Symphony in E minor (*Gaelic*), Royal Philharmonic Orchestra/Karl Krueger (Library of Congress OMP-105).
10. Benjamin Brooks, “The ‘How’ of Creative Composition: A Conference with Mrs. H. H. A. Beach,” *Etude* 41 (March 1943): 208.
11. Ibid.
12. Burnet C. Tuthill, “Mrs. H. H. A. Beach,” *Musical Quarterly* 26 (July 1940): 299.
13. Block, “Why Amy Beach Succeeded as a Composer,” 44.
14. Quoted in *ibid.*
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 47.
17. Quoted in Epstein.
18. Ammer, 76.
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21. H. A. S., “At 74, Mrs. Beach Recalls Her First Critics,” *Musical Courier*, 15 May 1941, clipping file, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center.
22. Ibid.
23. Myra Garvey Eden, “Anna Hyatt Huntington, Sculptor, and Mrs. H. H. A. Beach, Composer: A Comparative Study of Two Women Representatives of the American Cultivated Tradition in the Arts,” Ph. D. dissertation, Syracuse University, 1977, 61.
24. Brooks, 208.
25. Adrienne Fried Block, “Arthur P. Schmidt: Music Publisher and Champion of American Women Composers,” in *The Musical Woman: An International Perspective, 1984-85*, ed. Judith Lang Zaimont, Catherine Overhauser and Jane Gottlieb, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 146.
26. Louis C. Elson, 300-301.
27. Eden, 63.
28. *Boston Herald*, 8 February 1892, quoted in Percy Goetschius, *Mrs. H. H. A. Beach* (Boston: Arthur P. Schmidt, 1906), 68-69.
29. *Book News*, March 1892, quoted in Goetschius, 63.

30. *New York Sun*, 18 February 1892, quoted in Goetchius, 61.
 31. Quoted in Ammer, 78.
 32. Rupert Hughes, *Contemporary American Composers* (Boston: L. C. Page, 1900), 427.
 33. *Ibid.*, 433.
 34. *Ibid.*, 438.
 35. *Ibid.*, 425.
 36. *Ibid.*, 434.
 37. Block, "Why Amy Beach Succeeded as a Composer," 53.
 38. *Ibid.* The Women's Building at the Columbian Exposition (designed by Sophia G. Hayden, and decorated by leading women artists of the day) was the brainchild of Susan B. Anthony. The members of the organizing committee—women of diverse political stripes—were very concerned that their endeavour would not be tarnished by any hint of feminism or radicalism. Nonetheless, the stated purpose of the Women's Building was to demonstrate that women's achievements were equal to those of men. As Maud Howe Elliot expressed it in the preface to the official edition of *Art and Handicraft in the Women's Building*: "The World's Columbian Exposition has afforded woman an unprecedented opportunity to present to the world a justification of her claim to be placed on complete equality with man." The directorship of the Women's Building was entrusted to Mrs. Palmer Potter, a wealthy Chicago art collector, and her 117-member Board of Lady Managers. Potter herself did not advocate equal rights for women, but believed strongly in women's creative potential. Germaine Greer, *The Obstacle Race: The Fortunes of Women Painters and Their Work* (London: Picador, 1981), 322; Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1990), 230.
 39. Block, "Why Amy Beach Succeeded as a Composer," 53.
 40. *Musical Courier*, 10 May 1893, 14, quoted in Ammer, 78.
 41. Quoted in Caryl B. Storrs, program notes for the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra's performance of Beach's *Gaelic Symphony*, 14 December 1917.
 42. *Musical Courier*, 23 February 1898, 29-30.
 43. *Boston Sunday Journal*, 1 November 1896, 2.
 44. *Brooklyn Standard Union*, 29 March 1897, quoted in Goetschius, 94.
 45. William Armstrong, "New Gems in the Old Classics: A Talk with Mrs. H. H. A. Beach," *Etude* 22 (February 1904): 1.
 46. Louis. C. Elson, 301-302.
 47. *New York Times*, 29 March 1899, quoted in Goetschius, 114.
 48. "Musical Items," *Etude* 15 (March 1897): 61.
 49. E. Lindsay Merrill, "Mrs. H. H. A. Beach: her Life and Music," Ph. D. dissertation, Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester, 1963, 8.
 50. Mrs. H. H. A. Beach, "Women's Work in Music, a Letter from Mrs. Beach," *Etude* 16 (May 1898): 100.
 51. Ammer, 80.
 52. The Concerto was last heard during Beach's lifetime in 1917, when it was played by the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Karl Muck with the composer as soloist. It was revived in 1976 by Mary Louise Boehm, who performed it with the American Symphony under Morton Gould. Ammer, 81.
 53. *Boston Saturday Evening Gazette*, 8 April 1900, quoted in Goetschius, 120-21.
 54. Louis C. Elson, 302.
 55. Eden, 69.
 56. *Musical Courier*, 24 March 1915, clipping file, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center.
 57. Clare P. Peeler, "American Woman Whose Musical Message Thrilled Germany: Shipboard Glimpses of Mrs. H. H. A. Beach," *Musical America*, 17 October 1914, clipping file, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center.
 58. *Ibid.*
 59. Amy Beach to Arthur P. Schmidt, 30 November 1912, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. Also on microfilm at the New York Public Library at Lincoln Center.
 60. *Musical Courier*, 11 February 1913, clipping file, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center.
 61. Amelie Nikisch, wife of conductor Artur Nikisch, was greatly admired as a composer of operettas.
 62. Dr. Ferdinand Pfohl, *Hamburger Nachrichten*, 3 December 1913, clipping file, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center.
 63. Edwin Hughes, "The Outlook for the Young American Composer: An Interview with the Distinguished American Composer, Mrs. H. H. A. Beach," *Etude* 33 (January 1915): 13.
 64. *New Grove Dictionary of American Music*, 1986 ed., s. v. "Beach, Amy Marcy," by Adrienne Fried Block.
 65. Quoted in John Tasker Howard, *Our American Music*, 3rd ed. (New York: Crowell, 1946), 312.
 66. Epstein.
 67. Ammer, 84.
 68. Quoted in *ibid.*
 69. Quoted in Edwin Hughes, 14.
 70. Epstein.
 71. Eden, 82-83.
 72. Harriette Brower, "A Personal Interview with Mrs. H. H. A. Beach," *Musical Observer* 12 (May 1915): 273.
 73. Block, "Why Amy Beach Succeeded as a Composer," 54.
 74. Judith Tick, "Women as Professional Musicians in the United States, 1870-1900," *Yearbook for Inter-American Musical Research* 9 (1973): 106.
 75. Louis. C. Elson, 305.
 76. Judith Tick, *American Women Composers before 1870* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1983), 232.
 77. See, for example, *Greene's Biographical Encyclopedia of Composers*, 1985 ed., s. v. "Beach, Mrs. H. H. A.," by David Mason Greene.
 78. Coral Paglin and Mary Louise Boehm, program notes for Michael May's Carnegie Hall performance of Beach's *Mass in E-flat*, 28 October 1984.
 79. Dean Elder, "Where Was Amy Beach All These Years? An Interview with Mary Louise Boehm," *Clavier* 9 (December 1976): 16. See also Arthur Cohn's review of the Concerto, in his *Recorded Classical Music: A Critical Guide to Compositions and Performances* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1981), 138.
 80. Quoted in Elder, 14.
- About the author:*
- Eugene Gates holds an M.A. in music criticism from McMaster University, and an Ed.D. in aesthetics of music from the University of Toronto. A member of the faculty at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto, he is also organist and choirmaster of St. Barnabas Anglican Church, Toronto, and is active as an accompanist, adjudicator, examiner, and clinician. His doctoral dissertation was on nineteenth-century women composers, and his articles on women composers and other musical subjects have appeared in the *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, *Canadian Music Educator*, *Journal of the American Liszt Society*, *Musical Educators Journal*, *Tempo*, *VivaVoce*, *Czech Music*, *University of Toronto Quarterly*, and the *Kapralova Society Journal*, which he co-edits with Karla Hartl.

Čekám Tě! Janáčkovské Inspirace (I Am Waiting for You! Janáček Inspirations). CD Review

Lucie Slepánková, mezzo-soprano; Martin Opršál, vibraphone, xylophone; with the Kapralova Quartet featuring Veronika Panochová (violin), Simona Hurníková (violin), Karolína Stražilová (viola), and Simona Hečová (cello). Radioservis, Prague (2009).

If music for string quartet could ever be defined as hip, then the CD, *Čekám Tě! (I Am Waiting for You)*, would be the exemplary barometer of cool to which all others would aspire. From the CD's thematic concept to the inclusion of mezzo-soprano, percussion, and string quartet instrumentation, this recording exudes stylish and thought-provoking music.

The CD features the compositions of Hudbaby (The MusiCrones), a group of young female composers. This group was formed in 1997 at the Janáček Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Brno, where the majority of the members had studied.

The central theme of this recording takes inspiration from one of Leoš Janáček's miniatures from the 1928 piano cycle, *The Album for Kamila Stösslová*. The particular miniature used here is largely regarded by scholars to be Janáček's last composition and further, the words "I am awaiting you!" were written in the score and were meant for Kamila, Janáček's muse and love of the last decade of his life. Hudbaby took inspiration from this very personal message from Janáček to Stösslová, transforming the concept into a contemporary commentary on music, love, and life reinterpreted for voice, string quartet, and percussion. Each of the five members of Hudbaby took the subject matter and made it their own all the while paying tribute to Janáček. The result takes the listener on a clever and interesting thematic journey as even the individual tracks expound upon the concept of waiting for a loved one, which runs the gamut of emotions from breathless expectation, desire, impatience, and even apprehension.

The expedition begins with Markéta Dvořáková's composition for string quartet, *Čekám Tě (I am waiting for you)*. Masterfully executed by the Kapralova Quartet, the opening phrases were an extremely remarkable way to begin an expedition of passing time. The listener is jolted to attention with a wall of dissonant, yet fragile sound. This sparse and intense piece, although largely dissonant coupled with extended technique, was a highly effective way to begin.

This is followed by Kateřina Růžičková's version of *Čekám Tě! (I am waiting for you!)*, a single-movement work scored for mezzo-soprano, xylophone, and string quartet. This appealing combination yields fascinating textures of sound, beginning with the haunting pairing of cello and voice, and ending with mezzo-soprano Lucie Slepánková quietly whispering and chanting repetitions of "Čekám Tě!"

By far, my favorite composition was the piece entitled *Mezi čekáním (Between waiting)* for string quartet and electronics, written by Petra Gavlasová. Here the composer interweaves beautiful, lush and tonal melodies with electronic and dissonant textures. However, the utilization of electronics is understated and subdued. One difficulty in recording this work is that it cannot capture the entire experience of the performance, which is enhanced with choreography and visual elements. According to Petra Gavlasová, in a live performance, "the players find themselves in a gradually illuminated dark space which they enter as they start playing. The composition is divided internally into four parts that are bridged by electronics, with all four players finally playing together in the fourth part. The electronics transform the recorded sounds of the players' instruments and several motives from Janáček's compositions for strings. It reflects and connects the musical material performed live by the players, sometimes providing answers to their 'waiting'." The lack of visual aides in no way diminished my thorough enjoyment of this multi-layered psychological journey about waiting and expectation.

The voyage begins with a lonely and poignant cello melody, with punctuated silences becoming as important as the sounds. The music soon grows in intensity, marked by rhythmic outbursts, forte pizzicato,

accelerando, and truncated phrases. This melody continues as electronics enter unobtrusively, quietly adding commentary to the 'journey' of waiting, even blurring the distinction between instrumental sounds and electronic sounds. Slowly the texture becomes more dense, with one instrument added at a time, and a periodical re-visiting of the haunting opening melody. Electronic sounds continue to add commentary. This interesting dialogue and counterpoint between the voices escalates about two-thirds of the way into the work, as if waiting becomes frustrating and perhaps futile, if only for a brief moment. All the voices come together as one towards the end, ultimately dissolving into electronic music combined with the re-emergence of the opening melody. Both elements quietly fade into silence. The piece concludes with wonderful ambiguity, leaving it up to the listener to decide if the waiting ends in disappointment or fulfillment.

The journey continues with ...*a já vím, že přijdeš...* (...and I know you will come...), composed by Jana Bařínková for vibraphone and string quartet. It is a minimalist passage of time featuring repetition and gradual development of chord sequences. Waiting for something now becomes a tense combination of hope and fear.

The final composition is a six-movement work for mezzo-soprano, xylophone, and string quartet entitled *Nejpěknější z andělů (The Fairest of Angels)*, and written by Lenka Kilič. This piece is dedicated to Janáček's wife, Zdenka, with the middle movements representing the women that affected her life. The initial movement is a musical reflection of Zdenka as a young bride, with the final movement coming to full circle, depicting Zdenka after Janáček's death. This moving and widely varied musical tribute is indeed an effective way to end the CD. Not only does it utilize all of the musicians, it is a fitting way to end a voyage about waiting for a loved one and brings to cyclical conclusion this modern commentary about the women in Janáček's life.

This hip and thought-provoking journey would not have been nearly as effective and enjoyable without the superb playing of the Kapralova Quartet, masterful execution by percussionist Martin Opršál, and beautiful, lyrical singing by mezzo-soprano Lucie Slepánková. Hudbaby's project provides the listener with an enjoyable and thought-provoking journey. And in fact, I will have much to ponder the next time I find myself waiting for a loved one.

Michelle Latour

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