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Amy Beach's Life and Works

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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.

– Amy Beach¹

The eighteenth-century ideal of a master musician equally skilled as performer and composer – exemplified by Bach, Haydn, and Mozart – became increasingly rare in the nineteenth century. Despite noteworthy exceptions like Mendelssohn, Liszt, and Rachmaninoff, most musicians specialized in one or another aspect of musical production, and their choices were reinforced by the expectations of critics and audiences. In assessing the life and career of Amy Marcy Cheney Beach (1867–1944), it is enlightening to view her as one of those rare individuals who achieved fame as both a performer and a composer. The decision to vacillate between composer's desk and piano bench was not entirely her own, but it is crucial to a complete understanding of her significance.

Beach's origin story – like those of Mozart and Mendelssohn – centers on her role as a child prodigy. Her mother reported that the precocious child had a repertoire of forty tunes before her first birthday, and that she could improvise a simple harmony to her mother's melody before her second birthday. She exhibited early evidence of perfect pitch, along with a synesthetic association of colors with pitches and keys. This association was so strong that as a toddler she cried if adults sang a song that she knew in a different key than she had learned, and as a six-year-old she transposed a piano piece up a step to accommodate for an out-of-tune piano at a friend's house.²

In a 1914 article entitled “Why I Chose My Profession,” Beach recalled that her mother, “who was a fine musician and wanted to raise one,” subscribed to Gerald Stanley Lee’s “top bureau-drawer principle” of education, in which a student’s motivation is stimulated by keeping a desired object just out of reach.³ In her case, this meant that the family piano, which Clara Cheney played often, was off limits to her daughter Amy during her toddler years. The future composer and pianist was obsessed with music and thought about it constantly, but she was limited to singing until the age of four or five, when a visiting aunt granted her access to the instrument. Amy was then able to play the songs that she had been singing and to improvise accompaniments as she had seen her mother do. When she was six, her mother consented to giving her lessons, and by the age of seven, her playing of a Beethoven sonata and Chopin waltz was sufficiently advanced that her parents received offers from several music managers. These were declined, and Amy’s public performances were curtailed.

The family moved from her birthplace of Henniker, New Hampshire, to Chelsea, Massachusetts, around 1871, and from there to Boston in 1875. This opened a new world of educational possibilities, and Amy had the opportunity to study piano with professional teachers, first Ernst Perabo (1845–1920) and later Carl Baermann (1839–1913). Both had been trained in German conservatories, and it may have been they who reportedly advised Beach’s parents to send her abroad for a European musical education. By this time, German musical education had become the preferred professional training for any American who could afford it,⁴ but again Amy’s parents refused to consider this course of action.

Adrienne Fried Block explored the motivations and results of the restrictions placed on Amy’s musical opportunities by her parents. She argued that the “top bureau-drawer principle” was an outgrowth of Protestant religious practices in child-rearing, and that her parents’ decisions prioritized Amy’s eternal salvation over her musical development.⁵ There is an additional explanation, however, that may have unconsciously played into their deliberations.

Amy’s parents, Charles Abbot Cheney (1844–95) and Clara Imogene Marcy Cheney (1845–1911), were members of the Progressive Generation (born 1843–59), whose worldview was shaped by the political polarization and harrowing losses of the Civil War. When they became parents, this cohort of Americans prioritized home comforts and security over adventure and risk. Their children, known as the Missionary Generation (born 1860–82), grew up in the 1870s loved and protected in ways that would not be replicated until the Baby Boomer childhood of the 1950s. When the

Missionary Generation reached adulthood, full of confidence and accustomed to having their wishes fulfilled, they set out to change the world as missionaries, civic leaders, and reformers. These generational characteristics help to explain Clara's need to restrict her daughter's public activities as well as Amy's desire for a public career.⁶

Beach's recollection of the next stage of her life is telling. She wrote, "When I was sixteen, I was allowed to make my *début* in Boston. I played the Moscheles G minor concerto with a large orchestra. Life was beginning!"⁷ This October 1883 debut, so long deferred, was an unalloyed triumph. The *Boston Transcript* gushed:

She is plainly a pianist to the manner born and bred. Her technique is facile, even and brilliant; her use of the pedal exceptionally good. But fine as her technical qualifications are, it is the correctness and precocity of her musical understanding that must, in the end, most excite admiration. Much natural musical sentiment must, of course, be taken for granted; but the purity and breadth of her phrasing, the intelligence with which she grasps the relation of the several parts of a composition to the whole, show how thoroughly musical her training must have been. That she does not play like a woman of forty need not be said. The ineffable charm of her playing is that perfect youthful freshness, directness and simplicity of sentiment which belongs to her age, but which one very rarely finds so utterly free from the little awkwardnesses which are also wont to characterize immaturity.⁸

Praise like this can open doors for a young performer, and now that her parents' permission had been granted, Amy played frequently in solo recitals, chamber music, and concerto performances throughout the Boston area. On March 28, 1885, she debuted with the Boston Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Wilhelm Gericke in the Chopin Concerto in F minor, op. 21, earning praise for her sensitive interpretation of this notoriously challenging work. A month later, she famously impressed America's leading conductor, Theodore Thomas, when he conducted her in a performance of the Mendelssohn Concerto. He assumed that a seventeen-year-old girl would not be able to handle the brisk tempo of the finale, but when she heard his slow tempo, she "swung the orchestra into time," to the amusement of all present.⁹ She proved herself equally adept at solo recitals and chamber music, making inroads with the most prominent musicians in Boston's close-knit professional circle.¹⁰ It seems that in her teens she already possessed the technique, artistic sensitivity, and fearlessness that are the essential ingredients of a successful performance career. She also possessed unusually large hands, with broad palms and very long thumbs, as shown in Figure 1.1.



Figure 1.1 Wedding photo of Dr. and Mrs. Beach. Box 17 envelope 15, Amy Cheney Beach (Mrs. H. H. A. Beach) Papers, 1835–1956, MC 51, Milne Special Collections and Archives, University of New Hampshire Library, Durham, NH.

But on December 2, 1885, Amy's career trajectory shifted dramatically with her marriage to Dr. Henry Harris Aubrey Beach (1843–1910). Their engagement had been announced in the Boston papers in mid-August, but it is unclear how the two met.¹¹ A prominent surgeon at Massachusetts General Hospital and lecturer at Harvard University who was actively building a private practice treating Boston's wealthiest and most socially connected residents, Beach was a 42-year-old widower when he married the 18-year-old Amy. She moved into his home at 28 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston's exclusive, tree-lined counterpart to New York's Park Avenue. She immediately took his name, and for the rest of her life was known in the United States as "Mrs. H. H. A. Beach." Her new home came with a staff of servants, allowing her to devote all her time to music and her husband. The spacious second-floor music room contained a grand piano, ample shelf space for her growing collection of books and scores, and a bay

window facing north onto the trees of Commonwealth Avenue. A reporter who described the room in 1897 noted, "A quaint empire desk inlaid in various light woods tells the place where all Mrs. Beach's best and most serious work has been done, and it is considered a family friend and treasure."¹²

Dr. Beach's position in Boston society was worth protecting, which may help to explain – but not justify – the stipulations he placed on his young bride. She was not to play concerts for money, but rather to donate her fees to charitable causes. During the twenty-five years of their marriage, she averaged one solo recital per year, often advertised prominently as a benefit for a specific charity. She was allowed to accept invitations to play chamber music or concerto performances with orchestra more often, but again the fees were donated to charity. She was also not to teach piano lessons, which were associated with working women of a lower class. She was expected to serve as hostess on social occasions as appropriate for a female member of Boston's elite Brahmin set. These stipulations clearly changed her status in the city. When Amy played the Mozart Concerto in D minor with the Boston Symphony Orchestra on February 20, 1886 (less than three months after her marriage), she donated her fees to the free-bed fund of the Massachusetts General Hospital, and her concert two weeks later was for the "kindergarten entertainment at Mr. Robert Treat Paine's."¹³ The *Boston Transcript* review of the BSO concert was considerably less specific about her playing than that of the previous year. The reviewer stated: "Mrs. Beach, who was enthusiastically received by the audience, played it very beautifully indeed; especially fine was her playing of the Romanza (second movement); she struck the true keynote of Mozart's grace." He then went on a lengthy diatribe about the cadenza chosen for the performance, without another word about her playing.¹⁴ The impression is of a reviewer who does not wish to say too much.

Again, Amy found her career path circumscribed by a member of the Progressive Generation. If Dr. Beach restricted her performance career, however, he had bold plans for her compositional career. It is unclear why he saw potential in her as a composer, since at the time of her marriage she had published only two songs with piano accompaniment. "The Rainy Day" (published by Oliver Ditson in 1883) was a setting of a Longfellow poem whose vocal line begins with a direct quotation from the third movement of Beethoven's "Pathétique" Sonata, op. 13, transposed from C minor to F minor. "With Violets," op. 1, no. 1 (Arthur P. Schmidt, 1885) was a setting of a poem by Kate Vannah dedicated to the opera star Adelina Patti. Dr. Beach also had intimate knowledge of a third song, however: on

January 16, 1885, he had sung her unpublished song “*Jeune fille, jeune fleur*” on a recital of voice students of Mr. L. W. Wheeler.¹⁵ These songs are pleasant and sentimental but do not show the maturity and technique that reviewers had praised in her piano playing. More to the point, they contain no inkling of the large-scale works that would eventually become her most distinctive creations. Nonetheless, the couple agreed that she would devote the bulk of her time to composition rather than performance. As an added incentive, she was allowed to keep the publication royalties her compositions generated.¹⁶

Beach’s composition training had been limited to one year of harmony and music theory lessons with Junius Welch Hill (1840–1916). In 1885, Amy’s parents had consulted the recently appointed conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Wilhelm Gericke (1845–1925), who recommended that she learn composition by studying scores of European masters rather than studying with a composition teacher.¹⁷ After her marriage, Henry urged her to follow the same course. A conscientious student, she acquired the best books available on orchestration and counterpoint, along with a substantial collection of scores. These she studied carefully to develop the skills she would need to go beyond songwriting. It is a testament to her discipline and innate talent that her autodidactic approach yielded remarkable results and gave her the tools for a successful compositional career. In later years, she gave credit to her husband and mother for developing her into a composer:

When Dr. Beach and I were married, he felt that my future lay in composition, and very often he and I would discuss works as I was preparing them. He might differ as to certain expressions and so would my mother, with the result that I had two critics before facing a professional critic. And Dr. Beach would be very impartial and hard-boiled.¹⁸

The following twenty-five years saw Beach’s most productive period of compositional activity and a steady trajectory of growth. Her first major work – which will be discussed in the chapter by Matthew Phelps – was a setting of the Latin Mass for choir, soloists, and orchestra. The work was premiered by the Boston Handel and Haydn Society on February 7, 1892, a reflection of the Boston musical establishment’s support for their hometown composer. Her next major work was a symphony that made extensive use of Irish folk themes. Known as the “Gaelic” Symphony, it was written in the shadow of American debates over musical nationalism spurred by the New York residency of Antonín Dvořák from 1892 to 1895 and was premiered by the BSO on October 31, 1896. This performance elicited

a much-quoted note of appreciation from her fellow Boston composer George Whitefield Chadwick, who confirmed her position in the inner circle of local musicians: "I always feel a thrill of pride myself whenever I hear a fine new work by any one of us, and as such you will have to be counted in, whether you will or not – one of the boys."¹⁹ The experience she gained in orchestrating her symphony prepared her for her next orchestral work, the Piano Concerto in C-sharp minor, completed and performed with the BSO in 1900. These two works will be analyzed in Douglas Shadle's chapter on the orchestral works.

Beach enjoyed a fruitful relationship with the Kneisel Quartet and its first violinist, Franz Kneisel (1865–1926). She performed major chamber works with them, including the Schumann Piano Quintet, op. 44, in 1894 and the Brahms Piano Quintet, op. 34, in 1900. Her familiarity with these works, along with her relationship with Kneisel, informed the composition of her Violin Sonata, op. 34 (1896), and Piano Quintet in F-sharp minor, op. 67 (1907). Both are serious works whose virtuosity is used not for empty display but for the exploration of serious thematic connections. Beach's engagement with the European cosmopolitan tradition in these works will be the subject of Larry Todd's chapter on the chamber music.

The major works that Beach wrote and premiered between 1892 and 1907 represent much more than the determined efforts of an autodidact. Beach (and by extension her principal patron, her husband) directly confronted the assertions of George P. Upton in his influential 1880 book *Woman in Music*. Writing five years before Beach's marriage, Upton acknowledged that women had successfully created serious works of painting, poetry, and fiction but had achieved nothing comparable in music:

[W]ho is to represent woman in the higher realm of music? While a few women, during the last two centuries, have created a few works, now mostly unknown, no woman during that time has written either an opera, oratorio, symphony, or instrumental work of large dimensions that is in the modern repertory. Man has been the creative representative."²⁰

He went on to assert that the proper role of women in music was as muse to great men. In the home at 28 Commonwealth Avenue, this hierarchy was reversed, as Dr. Beach played the role of muse and his wife created works in the major cosmopolitan genres that Upton had declared to be the province of men alone because of their ability "to treat emotions as if they were mathematics, to bind and measure and limit them within the rigid laws of harmony and counterpoint."²¹ Beach's choral, orchestral, and chamber works put the lie to Upton's claim that women lacked the intellectual

facility to plan and create works of integrity in these genres. Of her husband's role in her compositional development, Beach later recalled,

It was he more than any one else who encouraged my interest upon the field of musical composition in the larger forms. It was pioneer work, at least for this country, for a woman to do, and I was fearful that I had not the skill to carry it on, but his constant assurance that I could do the work, and keen criticism whenever it seemed to be weak in spots, gave me the courage to go on.²²

As Beach produced ever more ambitious concert works in the major genres of Western music, she continued to broaden her pianistic repertoire in her annual benefit recitals. These events sometimes included her own piano works, but their primary focus was European solo piano literature from the Baroque to Romantic eras. During the 1890s and 1900s, she composed a steady stream of shorter solo works with programmatic titles, including the *Four Sketches*, op. 15 (1892) and the *Trois morceaux caractéristiques*, op. 28 (1894). Curiously, she never composed a piano sonata, but in 1904 she produced a solo piano work that was a worthy companion to her major works in other genres. The *Variations on Balkan Themes*, op. 60 (1904), is a 30-minute compendium of virtuoso techniques that introduces and develops four songs shared with her by a missionary to Bulgaria. The poignancy of the first of these songs, "O Maiko moyá," inspired some of her most evocative pianistic writing. Her extensive catalog of piano compositions is explored in Kirsten Johnson's chapter.

The preceding works demonstrate that Beach took seriously the imperative of composing in the major concert genres, but it was her solo songs that gained her a national following. In a 1918 interview, she explained how her composition of songs differed from her work on more "serious" genres:

I write, primarily, for instruments – my song writing I have always considered rather as recreation. When I am working on some larger work, as when I was writing my piano Concerto, I will occasionally find myself tiring – "going stale," as they say. Then I just drop the larger work for the day and write a song. It freshens me up; I really consider that I have given myself a special treat when I have written a song. In this way I have written about a hundred songs.²³

As Katherine Kelton discusses in her chapter, Beach's art songs spanned the entirety of her career and drew from a vast array of textual sources. At their best, they contain tuneful melodies that lie well in the voice, supported by piano accompaniments that enhance but do not overpower the vocal lines. Her early song "Ecstasy," op. 19, no. 2 (1892), was so successful that its royalties financed the purchase of a vacation home in Centerville on

Cape Cod.²⁴ Several of her song sets strike a balance between the serious aspirations of her instrumental works and the lighter tone of her parlor songs, most notably the *Three Shakespeare Songs*, op. 37 (1897), and the *Three Browning Songs*, op. 44 (1900). Her setting of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poem "When soul is joined to soul," op. 62 (1905), illustrates her Romantic penchant for communicating emotion through harmony in procedures reminiscent of her contemporaries Wolf and Mahler.

As Beach's reputation grew, she found herself in demand as a composer for women's events at international expositions outside of the Boston area. She was commissioned to write *Festival Jubilate*, op. 17, for the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago as well as a *Hymn of Welcome*, op. 42, for the 1898 Trans-Mississippi International Exposition in Omaha, Nebraska. She would later be called upon to write a *Panama Hymn*, op. 74, for the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco. These occasional pieces were too specific to have a significant afterlife, but they reflected her reputation as a leading American composer.

Beach's growing stature in Boston circles and her national reputation were materially aided by the support of Arthur P. Schmidt (1846–1921), a German immigrant who made his fortune as a music publisher in Boston. Schmidt was so grateful for the opportunities afforded him in the United States that he made a practice of promoting American composers, even when their works were not highly remunerative.²⁵ He was also a patient of Dr. Beach who was grateful for the medical care he received. The extensive correspondence between the publisher and the two Beaches demonstrates a close friendship as well as an important professional relationship.²⁶ Schmidt was Amy's sole publisher during her twenty-five-year marriage, and his carefully prepared editions of nearly all the works she composed during this era contributed to her growing reputation. He afforded her the courtesy of multiple proofs, allowing her to develop high standards and an assiduous skill at proofreading. In 1906, he published a handsome 134-page booklet with a biographical essay by the eminent music theorist Percy Goetschius (1853–1943), a complete work list, and extensive excerpts from positive reviews.²⁷ She used this pamphlet frequently for publicity purposes in the following years. Bill Faucett's chapter chronicles the importance of Schmidt to her early career as well as her subsequent turn to other publishers.

The death of Beach's husband on June 28, 1910, brought an end to her comfortable life in Boston society and initiated a series of events that proved transformational for the rest of her life. Adrienne Fried Block's detective work has demonstrated that Beach was not a wealthy widow, as

was generally assumed. She speculates that – unknown to Amy – the couple may have been living beyond their means, as Dr. Beach left her only a small inheritance, including the heavily mortgaged house on Commonwealth Avenue. Within a short time, she dismissed the servants and moved with her ailing mother to the Hotel Brunswick. In October, Beach declined Schmidt's offer of an advance on future royalties, writing instead:

Whatever can come from the sale of my compositions will be a great help to me, until I am strong enough to take up other musical work. Therefore I shall appreciate gratefully any increase of advertising or other placing of my work before the public that you may see fit to undertake.²⁸

In a subsequent letter freighted with symbolic as well as practical significance, Beach offered to return the works of art that Schmidt had given to her husband as gifts over the years of their friendship.²⁹ He refused to take them back, but there is no evidence that he acceded to her wishes for increased advertising of her works.

Her mother's death on February 18, 1911, deepened her grief while paradoxically removing the last impediment to a new life, and she took a bold step in that direction by sailing for Europe on September 5, 1911, her forty-fourth birthday. She had never been out of the country before, and she sailed with the intention not of taking a grand tour but rather of reestablishing her career as a performer. She lived for the next three years in the Pension Pfanner in Munich, the same hotel as soprano Marcella Craft (1874–1959), who had accompanied her on the transatlantic crossing. Dr. and Mrs. Beach had known the Indiana-born Craft since her days as a vocal student in Boston in 1898; now she was a leading singer with the Bavarian Opera, where she had sung under the direction of Richard Strauss. Beach spent her first year soaking up the culture by attending concerts and playing in private gatherings at which Craft introduced her to prominent German and expatriate American musicians.

By the fall of 1912, Beach had engaged a concert manager, who scheduled a series of concerts for her under the name of Amy Beach. She later described to an interviewer her reluctance to drop her husband's name after so many years, but the decision was made in the interest of promoting her to a European public that had no knowledge of her husband or his position in Boston society.³⁰ In the fall of 1912 she played her Violin Sonata on chamber concerts in Dresden and Leipzig to encouraging reviews. On January 17, 1913, she performed an entire concert in Munich, again playing the Violin Sonata and two sets of songs, along with songs by Brahms and piano solos by Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms (Block notes that this was a program of “the

four B's").³¹ The reviews of this concert and another five days later on which she played her Piano Quintet with the Munich Quartet were mixed, as critics struggled to assess her work as composer and performer. Her playing was deemed technically brilliant but lacking in tonal warmth. Her chamber works – the lengthy and virtuosic Violin Sonata and Piano Quintet – were praised for their artistic aspirations, while her songs were criticized for being pleasant, accessible, and unworthy of her talent.

Nevertheless, it was the songs that piqued the interest of the public, and she wrote several letters to Schmidt asking him to send more copies of her songs to European distributors so that she could capitalize on their new-found popularity. Schmidt had established a branch office in Leipzig, Germany, in 1889 and had actively promoted the works of Edward MacDowell and other American composers there for decades. In 1910 he had sold the rights to his European catalog to B. Schott's Söhne, perhaps explaining why he was unresponsive to Beach's pleas for better support. The correspondence tapered off in 1913 without satisfying her demands.³² From 1914 to 1921, Beach's new works were published by G. Schirmer, a New York rival to Schmidt.

Beach continued to expand her reach that spring with concerts and private performances in Breslau, Meran, and Berlin, all of which were reported in the American music journal *The Musical Courier*. At a Berlin gathering hosted by the journal's European correspondent Arthur Abell, she made the acquaintance of American conductor Theodore Spiering, whose advocacy proved decisive in the following year.

The fall 1913 concert season allowed Beach to hear her major orchestral works performed by three German orchestras. Concerts in Leipzig on November 22 and Hamburg on December 2 both featured her "Gaelic" Symphony and Piano Concerto. Her performance of the concerto with Spiering and the Berlin Philharmonic took place in the Prussian capital on December 18. After each of the three concerts, critics lavished praise on her playing and compositions. There were none of the complaints about her tone quality that she had received in chamber concerts the previous year, perhaps a reflection of the power and strength needed to project the solo part of a piano concerto. Her compositions were universally praised, and the words of the eminent critic Ferdinand Pfohl after her Hamburg performance proved useful for publicity materials for years to come. He characterized her as

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. To

this is added charm of poetic mood, delicacy and grace of melody, and a gift for rich, soulful harmonization.³³

Beach's European stay had been extended from an initial plan of one year to a third year with no definite end in sight. The entry of Germany into World War I on August 1, 1914, however, forced the cancellation of a planned tour of Europe that fall, and although she remained in Munich for another month, she reluctantly sailed for America, arriving in New York on September 18.³⁴ During her absence, the musical press had publicized her activities regularly, and she was about to discover the value of a European reputation with American audiences.

Beach returned immediately to Boston, where she received a warm welcome from friends and many potent reminders that her professional standing had grown rather than shrunk during her three-year absence. She was greeted by a standing ovation when she played for 700 persons at the Boston MacDowell Club on November 18. An all-Beach concert on December 16 (the first of many that would be given throughout the country in the years ahead) brought out Boston's musical and social elite. But despite – or perhaps because of – the many memories of her Boston years, Beach chose to leave her home and take up residence in New York instead. She relinquished the calm and settled life that her parents and her husband had envisioned for her, opting instead to travel the country, with the bustling musical center of New York as her home base.

During the next few years, Beach finally achieved her childhood dream of making her living as a touring piano virtuoso. Thanks to the reputation she had burnished in Europe, along with the efforts of a competent manager, she could state in a December 1914 interview, "I have now enough dates to be quite satisfied, especially as I want some of my time left for composition."³⁵ She crisscrossed the country, playing with major orchestras, accompanying singers in lieder recitals, and playing for the innumerable music clubs that formed such an important part of urban social life in the early twentieth century. Continuing her association with world's fairs, she was commissioned to write her *Panama Hymn*, op. 74, for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco in 1915, and she was honored with two "Mrs. H. H. A. Beach Days" by the Panama-California Exposition in San Diego on June 28, 1915, and May 2, 1916. One commentator called her the "lion of the hour" in February 1915.³⁶

Owing to the decades she had spent at the quaint inlaid empire desk in her music room at 28 Commonwealth Avenue, Beach had an extensive list of works to offer in concert. She was widely regarded as America's

leading female composer, and she had compositions in various genres that could suit nearly any recital or concert setting. As a consequence, she now played primarily her own works, which in turn helped promote sales of the musical scores. Her songs were perennial favorites, and her playing of her solo piano compositions earned accolades from amateur club members and professional critics alike. The Violin Sonata and Piano Quintet were featured on chamber concerts, while her "Gaelic" Symphony was played by prominent orchestras, including twice by Leopold Stokowski's Philadelphia Orchestra.

But none of her compositions was as personally gratifying as her Piano Concerto in C-sharp minor, op. 45. After its April 1900 premiere with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the work had languished, with just one subsequent performance (this time in a two-piano arrangement with Carl Faelten) in Boston on February 17, 1909. She revived the work with great success on her German concerts, after which it became a staple of her American tours during the mid-teens. She played it with at least five major orchestras, in Los Angeles, Chicago, Boston, Minneapolis, and St. Louis. In these performances, she truly attained the ideal of the Romantic pianist-composer who was thoroughly skilled in both disciplines. Chicago reviewer Stanley K. Faye wrote of her performance there:

Her concerto commands admiration equally with respect, for with its spirited construction, its fearlessness, and its triumphant force is combined a richness of material that is unusual. The composer has been prodigal of melody, bringing interesting incidents into the progress of the different movements with as much care and as good effect as she attains in the handling of the massed orchestra and the solo instrument. As a pianist Mrs. Beach will satisfy most people who demand that a woman play the piano like a man. The virile force with which she attains to an enormous tone is remarkable, the more so because she does not merely pound the piano but seeks for effects with the pedal. Her technic is superb. The one mighty descending passage almost at the end of the finale would in itself induce enthusiasm.³⁷

As she approached her fiftieth birthday, she was clearly at the height of her pianistic powers, and the large, muscular hands that were evident in the marriage photo with Dr. Beach allowed her to compete on equal terms with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

This invigorating new career path – deferred since her teens – lasted for only three years. In part because of wartime restrictions, but primarily because of the need to care for a terminally ill cousin, Beach drastically curtailed her concert engagements and took over the management of her own career in February 1918. For the next two years she lived in Hillsborough, New Hampshire, and restricted her performances to nearby venues. Though she

returned tentatively to touring in the early 1920s after the death of her cousin, she never rekindled the frenetic pace she had embraced after her return from Europe in 1914.

The decade of the 1910s began and ended with personal tragedy, but it had given Beach the opportunity to pursue her dream of a performance career. The demands of that career meant that her compositional output was reduced significantly. Although she wrote several virtuoso piano works and some of her most compelling songs during her time in Germany, she lacked the time and space for concentrated efforts in composition after returning to the United States. In the summer of 1921, a new source of inspiration reinvigorated her compositional activities and resulted in the second most productive period of her life.

Marian MacDowell (1857–1956), widow of the eminent composer Edward A. MacDowell (1860–1908), had turned their farm in Peterborough, New Hampshire, into an artist's colony in 1907. After declining several previous invitations, Beach finally agreed to spend a month as a fellow of the colony in 1921. There, in an isolated cabin in the New Hampshire woods, she found the conditions that had been lacking for artistic creation in the previous decade, and she released a flood of new compositions. Block attributes this inspiration to the fact that “in the following five years, nearly fifty works appeared (opp. 83–117), twice as many as in the previous ten years.”³⁸ Her pattern was to compose or sketch new works during her summer residencies at the colony and to revise, perform, and publish them during the winter seasons. She returned to the colony nearly every summer until declining health forced her to discontinue her residencies in 1941. Robin Rausch's chapter discusses the fruitful interaction between Beach and Marian MacDowell.

The solitude of the MacDowell Colony was crucial to Beach's renewed productiveness, but the natural surroundings also proved to be an important source of inspiration. Among the works created during the summer of 1921 were a pair of impressionistic piano pieces incorporating the song of the hermit thrush. This native bird was an insistent visitor to Beach's cabin, and its triadic song forms a striking counterpoint to the dreamy textures of the first piece, “A Hermit Thrush at Eve,” op. 92, no. 1. Continuing in the impressionistic vein, Beach also wrote a set of five piano pieces entitled *From Grandmother's Garden*, op. 97. These evocative works are harmonically adventurous and emulate the pianistic textures of Debussy and Ravel. Both of these sets were published by the Arthur P. Schmidt firm, now under the leadership of Henry Austin since the death of the founder on May 5, 1921.

The compositions of the 1920s also included several of the large-scale works that had been vital to her early career but absent during the 1910s. Her *Suite for Two Pianos Founded upon Old Irish Melodies*, op. 104, was an expansive virtuoso work of 106 pages. It was dedicated to the duo piano team of Rose and Otilie Sutro, who featured it on their tours of the United States and Europe. *The Canticle of the Sun*, op. 123, was a twenty-five-minute choral setting with orchestral accompaniment of a text by St. Francis of Assisi. It proved to be enduringly popular with both amateur and professional choirs, especially at churches in New York City. The *Quartet for Strings in One Movement*, op. 89, was begun in 1921 and completed during a visit to Italy in 1929. Block notes that this work is the most modern and tonally unstable of Beach's works, perhaps inspired by the Italian composer Gian Francesco Malipiero (1882–1973), but certainly influenced by the sparse textures of Inuit melodies she worked into the composition.³⁹

Following the loss of her remaining close family members in the early 1920s and the reduction of her touring activities, Beach increasingly expanded her engagement with musical organizations. She helped establish a Beach Club for music students in Hillsborough, New Hampshire, part of the nationwide movement of music clubs. She took leadership roles in the Mu Phi Epsilon music sorority as well as the Music Teachers National Association. Her extensive association with the National League of American Pen Women led to the founding of a Society for American Women Composers, for which she served as the first president in 1925. Her work with these organizations is chronicled in Marian Wilson Kimber's chapter.

After more than a decade in New Hampshire, Beach relocated in the fall of 1930 to New York City. There she spent her winters living at the American Women's Association Club House, filling her time with practicing, performing, and attending concerts. Summers were divided between the MacDowell Colony and her home in Centerville. She was surrounded by a circle of younger female professional musicians who provided companionship and musical collaboration. Perhaps most important to her musical life during this decade was her close association with David MacKay Williams (1887–1978), organist and choirmaster of St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church. He and the church's soprano soloist, Ruth Shaffner (1897–1981), were close friends and active supporters of Beach, who wrote numerous sacred works for the services. Religion had long been important to her, and the combination of musical stimulation and religious solace at St. Bart's allowed her to become, in Block's words, "virtually a composer in residence."⁴⁰

Beach continued to derive inspiration from her summers at the MacDowell Colony throughout the 1930s. Her still-formidable piano skills

were a valuable support during chamber music evenings at the colony, and she appreciated the associations she made with younger artists in various fields. Among the most fruitful was her connection with novelist and playwright Nan Bagby Stephens (1883–1946), who wrote the libretto to Beach's 1932 one-act opera, *Cabildo*. Stephens was a native of Atlanta, Georgia, whose works focused on Southern themes and often featured African American actors. As discussed in Nicole Powlison's chapter, the opera was a reworking of Stephens' 1926 play of the same title set in New Orleans during the early nineteenth century. The opera was premiered in Atlanta on February 27, 1945, two months after Beach's death.

Beach developed serious heart problems in 1940, causing her to end her performing career and virtually all travel for the last four years of her life. She was forbidden by her doctor from all piano playing, an ironic bookend to a life that began with her mother's forbidding of the family piano. She was remembered fondly by her fellow MacDowell colonists, and she received several important honors, even as World War II raged in Europe. On May 8, 1940, she was honored with a testimonial dinner and concert at Town Hall, attended by about 200 persons. Two months later, *Musical Quarterly* published a lengthy article by Burnet C. Tuthill, which summarized her career and praised her compositions.⁴¹ Though acknowledging that the music of the American Romantic composers was out of style at the time, he urged performers to revisit it in search of unanticipated beauties. In November 1942, a two-day festival in honor of her seventy-fifth birthday was presented at the Phillips Gallery in Washington, DC, by violinist Elena de Sayn. The programs featured a representative sampling of her most important compositions, with emphasis on the chamber works.

After months of declining health, Beach died on December 27, 1944, surrounded by friends in the Hotel Barclay. The *New York Times* published a generous obituary in which she was designated "most celebrated of American women composers."⁴² It listed several of her compositional "firsts" and described in detail some of the highlights of her performing career. In death as in life, Beach was remembered as both an accomplished pianist and a trailblazing composer. Not surprisingly, the obituary is devoted primarily to her nineteenth-century career, with scant mention of her recent activities. As the United States entered the final months of World War II, musical tastes had shifted decisively away from Romanticism, and the music of Amy Beach would need to wait for a more receptive generation to rediscover it later in the century.

Notes

1. Quoted in John Tasker Howard, *Our American Music* (New York: Crowell, 1931), 346.
2. These and other anecdotes were recorded in an eleven-page handwritten manuscript by her mother, Clara Imogene Cheney, dated February 26, 1892, box I:58, "Biographical Writings and Notes," MacDowell Colony Records, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. Amy Beach's own selection of childhood stories may be found in, "Why I Chose My Profession," *Mother's Magazine* 9, no. 2 (February 1914): 7–8; reprinted in *Music in the USA: A Documentary Companion*, ed. Judith Tick (New York: Oxford, 2008), 323–29.
3. Beach, "Why I Chose," 7.
4. For a history of this phenomenon, see E. Douglas Bomberger, "The German Musical Training of American Students, 1850–1900," PhD diss., University of Maryland, 1991; UMI 92–25,789.
5. Adrienne Fried Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 5–7.
6. An introduction to generational theory may be found in William Strauss and Neil Howe, *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584–2069* (New York: William Morrow, 1991), particularly pages 217–27 and 233–46, on the Progressive and Missionary Generations respectively. This book and a second, entitled *The Fourth Turning*, have been justifiably criticized for using past historical trends to predict the future, but their analysis of this time period is enlightening.
7. Beach, "Why I Chose," 326.
8. "Mr. Peck's Anniversary Concert," *Boston Evening Transcript*, October 25, 1883, 1. This verdict is confirmed by numerous reviews of the concert preserved in Cheney's scrapbook, pp. 2–5, box 12, Amy Beach Collection, University of New Hampshire. In particular, the unsigned article in the *Boston Advertiser*, October 25, 1883, goes into extensive detail on the specifics of her technique.
9. Beach, "Why I Chose," 326.
10. In a letter to her future husband, the prominent pianist Dr. William Mason gave a frank assessment of the seventeen-year-old Amy in October 1884: "... Miss Cheney whom I heard play and who certainly impressed me as being a young lady of remarkable talent and attainments. She has a strong, firm and at the same time elastic touch which evinces strength of character and at the same time she plays 'musikalisch' as the Germans express it." Letter from William Mason to Dr. H. H. A. Beach, October 3, 1884, box 3, folder 1, Beach Collection, University of New Hampshire.

11. The announcement read, "The engagement – not unexpected – of Dr. H. H. A. Beach and Miss Amy Marcy Cheney is announced." *Boston Globe*, August 16, 1885, 12. As clarified in Mason's letter in the previous footnote, Dr. Beach had taken an interest in Amy since at least October of the previous year. The simple wedding service, officiated by Rev. Phillips Brooks, was described in "Table Gossip," *Boston Globe*, December 6, 1885, 13.
12. A. M. B., "America's Chief Woman Composer," *Chicago Times-Herald*, November 28, 1897. Detailed descriptions of this music room are found in this article and in Edith Gertrude Kinney, "Mrs. H. H. A. Beach," *The Musician* 4, no. 9 (September 1899): 355.
13. "Music and Drama," *Boston Globe*, February 28, 1886, 13.
14. "Boston Symphony Orchestra," *Boston Evening Transcript*, February 23, 1886, 1.
15. Program, box 16, folder 2, Beach Collection, University of New Hampshire. The song was later published with the revised title "Jeune fille et jeune fleur," op. 1, no. 3.
16. For an in-depth analysis of the pros and cons of this arrangement, see Block, "Two Ways of Looking at a Marriage," Chapter 5 of *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 42–53.
17. Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 38–41.
18. H. A. S., "At 74, Mrs. Beach recalls her first Critics," *Musical Courier* 123, no. 10 (May 15, 1941): 7.
19. Letter from Chadwick to Beach, November 2, 1896, autograph book, p. 68, box 1, folder 19, Beach Collection, University of New Hampshire.
20. George P. Upton, *Woman in Music* (Boston: J. R. Osgood, 1880), 19.
21. Upton, *Woman in Music*, 22.
22. Letter to Mrs. Edwin H. Wiggers, August 24, 1935, P.E.O. Archives, New York; quoted in Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 48.
23. Quoted in Hazel Gertrude Kinscella, "Play No Piece in Public When First Learned, Says Mrs. Beach," *Musical America* 28, no. 19 (September 7, 1918): 9.
24. Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 98–99.
25. For discussions of Schmidt's role in American music history, see Adrienne Fried Block, "Arthur P. Schmidt, Music Publisher and Champion of American Women Composers," in *The Musical Women: An International Perspective*, vol. 2, 1984–1985, edited by Judith Lang Zaimont, Catherine Overhauser, and Jane Gottlieb (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1987): 144–76, and Wilma Reid Cipolla, "Arthur P. Schmidt: The Publisher and His American Composers," in *Vistas of American Music: Essays in Honor of William K. Kearns*, ed. Susan L. Porter and John Graziano (Warren, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 1999), 267–81.
26. For an illustration of the active role that Dr. Beach played in his wife's career, see the letter from Beach to Schmidt dated March 12, 1905, box 303, folder 3, Arthur P. Schmidt Collection, Library of Congress. Beach gives suggestions to

the publisher on strategies to ensure a "friendly audience" for performances of Amy's *Sea-Fairies*, op. 59.

27. [Percy Goetschius], *Mrs. H. H. A. Beach* (Boston: A. P. Schmidt, 1906).
28. Beach to A. P. Schmidt, October 1, 1910, box 303, folder 6, Schmidt Collection.
29. Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 178.
30. Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 183.
31. Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 184.
32. Box 303, folder 7, Arthur P. Schmidt Collection.
33. Quoted in Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 187.
34. Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 194–97.
35. Quoted in "Mrs. Beach in the West," *Musical Courier* 69, no. 23 (December 9, 1914): 13.
36. Emilie Frances Bauer, "Music in New York," *Musical Leader* 29, no. 5 (February 4, 1915): 122.
37. Stanley K. Faye, "Erudition Rules Symphony Program," *Chicago Daily News*, February 5, 1916.
38. Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 223.
39. Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 234–41.
40. Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 258. Beach's relationship with this church and its musicians is discussed in detail on pages 257–59.
41. Burnet C. Tuthill, "Mrs. H. H. A. Beach," *Musical Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (July 1940): 297–310.
42. "Mrs. Beach Dead; Composer, Pianist," *New York Times*, December 28, 1944, 19.