



AMY BEACH: TENACIOUS SPIRIT

By Ariel Foshay Bacon

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

“Women, in general, possess no artistic sensibility... nor genius. They can acquire a knowledge... of anything through hard work. But the celestial fire that emblazens and ignites the soul, the inspiration that consumes and devours..., these sublime ecstasies that reside in the depths of the heart are always lacking in women’s writings. These creations are as cold and pretty as women; they have an abundance of spirit but lack soul; they are a hundred times more reasoned than impassioned.”



INTRODUCTION



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- One of the first American trained performer-composers to earn an international reputation
- First woman to truly break through the dilettante stereotype and compose in larger orchestral forms.
- Works: Three hundred pieces, including a symphony, a piano concerto, a concert mass, numerous cantatas, chamber music, and an opera.
- Had successful American and European tours, and often played her own music.

THESIS: Beach's upbringing, social economic freedom and tenacity of spirit were the main reasons for her great success.

COMPARE/CONTRAST



Amy Beach 1867-1944

Composer/Performer

- Both woman were prodigies, performers, composers, wives, and widows.
- Similar life events in childhood, marriage, and widowhood.
- Similar societal values and natures, contrasting nurturing environments.

OUTCOME?



Clara Wieck Schumann
1819-1896

Performer/Interpreter



CHILDHOOD

CHILDHOOD



- Born Amy Marcy Cheney in Henniker, New Hampshire on September 5, 1867
- Extremely precocious musical sense
 - Perfect pitch
 - Impeccable memory
 - Saw music in colors
- Started to compose when she was “scarcely more than a baby.”
- Music was a constant in the Cheney’s home.
- Began lessons with her mother at the age of six.
 - Clara Cheney withheld the piano as punishment.

“I could not help thinking music. It was in my blood, it was the daily talk.” –Amy Beach

CHILDHOOD

- Born Clara Wieck on September 13, 1819 in Leipzig, Germany.
- Tumultuous childhood:
 - Parent's Divorce
 - Saxon Law = Motherless
 - Johanna Strobels dismissed
- Reich and Burton, "Clara Schumann: Old Sources, New Readings:"
 - Tension brought on a "mutism caused by emotional conflict."
- No trouble with notes. Started lessons with Wieck and in four years had gained a reputation as a prodigy.



“Mein alter, treuer Freund.” – Clara Schumann

EDUCATION

Amy-Sheltered

- Kept away from the piano: practice time was limited.
- Kept from performing
- Kept in the States to study
- Not given the traditional training in theory
- Subjected herself to the “systematic study of counterpoint, fugue, musical form and orchestration.”

Clara-Exploited

- Wieck’s main aim was to produce a virtuoso
- Neglected her general and social education for music
- Progressive education in theory, harmony, counterpoint, composition, singing, score reading and violin
- Diary as pedagogical tool
- Not taught any domestic arts



PREVAILING ATTITUDES

CULTURAL IDEALS ON WOMANHOOD

Cult of True Womanhood

- Women's place in domestic sphere based on biological traits and nature.
- Women should be protected from thinking and exercise.
- Traits: nurturing, moral, domestic, passive, and affectionate.
- A Young woman should be submissive and leave her future in the hands of her father and then her husband.
- Primary role: to be a partner to her husband and the bearer of his children.
- A career was not an option = sexual deviancy

Ideal of Real Womanhood

- Similar to the Cult of True Womanhood.
- Primary role the same.
- Real Womanhood called for an active and intelligent woman, to be a respectful contributor to her family and society.
- BUT: "the purpose for education was not to train a career, nor was it solely to benefit a woman."
- Education and activity a way to attract a suitable husband.
- "mastery was for ornament and artifice, not for art."

DEBUT

- 1883 at Boston Music Hall
- G minor Concerto by Moscheles with the New York Orchestra
- Rondo in E-flat by Chopin
- Amy: “Life was beginning.”
- 1883-1885, Amy performed in several concerts in the local area of Boston.
- Critical Reception:

UPTON'S *WOMEN IN MUSIC*

- 1880 book that discussed women's musical ability.

GEORGE UPTON

“Every technical detail of music is characterized by science in its most rigid forms. In this direction woman, except in rare instances, has never achieved great results. It does not seem that women will ever originate music in its fullest and grandest harmonic forms. She will always be the recipient and interpreter but there is little hope that she will be the creator.”

UPTON'S *WOMEN IN MUSIC*

- 1880 book that discussed women's musical ability.
- Upton wrote that women were controlled by their emotion and thereby were inherently incapable of producing an inspired outward expression.
- Sexist dichotomy in music.
- Male composer: decisions are “conscious intellection decisions.”
- Woman composer: decisions (if commendable) are a result of giftedness, not of a developed skill.

BOWERS AND TICK

“We have yet to recover from the ensuing onslaught of graphic imagery in which this piece was labeled masculine, that one feminine; this aspect of theory declared appropriate for men, that for women; this instrument deemed suitable for the lady, that for the gentleman. Many women fell into line. By turning out parlor songs and other kinds of sentimental music, they fulfilled social expectations about their proper role as composers.”



MARRIAGE

MRS. H. H. A. BEACH

- At eighteen, Amy was engaged and married to Henry Harris Aubrey Beach in 1885.
- Distinguished surgeon
- Taught at Harvard Medical School
- Twenty-five years Amy's senior
- An accomplished amateur singer and pianist.

STIPULATIONS

- Had to abandon her concert career except for a few annual charity performances.
- Not allowed to take payment or to give piano instruction
- Encouraged to compose instead.
- Became Mrs. H. H. A. Beach, and published and performed under this name until his death in 1910.

“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... I was happy and Dr. Beach was content.” –Amy Beach

MARRIAGE DEBATE

Marriage hindered Amy:

- Touring career after 1911
- Referred to married life as ‘arduous’
- Block’s theory in “A ‘Veritable Autobiography’? Amy Beach’s Piano Concerto in C-Sharp Minor, Op. 45.”

Marriage bolstered Amy:

JEUNE FILLE ET JEUNE FLEUR

The coffin sinks—The spotless roses' pride
Which on its lid a weeping father laid
Earth, thou didst bear them, and thou now does hide
The flower and the maid.

MARRIAGE DEBATE

Marriage hindered Amy:

- After her husband's death, Amy devoted herself to performing and composing.
- Referred to married life as 'arduous'
- Block's theory in "A 'Veritable Autobiography'? Amy Beach's Piano Concerto in C-Sharp Minor, Op. 45."

Marriage bolstered Amy:

- Dr. Beach felt that Amy's "future lay in composition."
- Found opportunities for her to perform her works.
- During her marriage, Amy composed and performed most of her greatest works.
- **IMPORTANT:** Marriage offered Amy financial security and independence.

WORKS COMPOSED DURING HER MARRIAGE

- 1889: Mass in E-flat, Op. 5
- 1896: *Gaelic Symphony*, Op. 32
 - Writer for the NY Times:

“Mrs. Beach has proved that it is possible for a woman to compose music which is worthy of serious attention. This cannot be said of many women composers, and in this country Mrs. Beach stands almost alone.”
- 1897: Sonata in A minor for Violin and Piano
- 1900: Piano Concerto in C-sharp minor, Op. 45

CRITICAL RECEPTION

“Overly boisterous”

“seeking after virility”

“delicate, melodious songs”

A review from the *Etude*:

“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.”

-dilettante and serious composer dichotomy.

MRS. SCHUMANN

- Married composer Robert Schumann in 1840.
 - Had to gain emancipation from Friedrich Wieck
- Clara: “Must I bury my art now?”
- Could not grow as a composer

“Clara has written a number of smaller pieces which show a musicianship and a tenderness of invention such as she has never before attained. But children, and a husband who is always living in the realms of imagination, do not go well with any composition. She cannot work at it regularly, and I am often disturbed to think how many tender ideas are lost because she cannot work them out.” –Robert Schumann

MORE COMPARISONS

- Both women had to be emancipated from their parents control.
 - Both women felt that marriage had buried their careers.
 - Both were married to musicians who understood and sympathized
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- Amy was free to hone her craft
 - The responsibilities of Clara's marriage kept her from that freedom
-
- Elizabeth Wood, "Women in Music."

SELF-PERCEPTION

Creator



Interpreter



A WORD ABOUT CLARA

- She didn't just “fall into line.”
- She organized her own tours.
- She helped shaped the look and feel of the solo concert
- She served as the principal piano teacher at the Hoch Conservatory for twenty years
- She performed at the Leipzig Gewandhaus seventy-eight times.
- She felt a calling to “reproduce great works.”

WIDOWHOOD

- Finally traveled to Europe in 1911
- Changed her name from Mrs. H. H. A. Beach to simply Amy Beach.
- Continued to perform until ill health in 1930.
- Founded the Society of American Woman Composers
- Contributor to the women's page of *The Etude*
- Amy Beach Clubs
- Received an honorary Master's degree from the University of New Hampshire
- Only two of her three hundred compositions went unpublished.

CONCLUSION

- She overcame the prejudices of her era.
- Large-scale compositions shattered the dilettante stereotype.
- She accomplished this by:
 - Working within her sphere
 - Financial Security
 - Childless freedom
 - A tenacity of spirit and humble belief

1913 GERMAN REVIEW

“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 Nikisch and Amy Beach in order to refute this foolish prejudice concerning woman 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 music 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 master of the entire technical apparatus.”

O Malko Moyá

Musical score for 'O Malko Moyá' in 2/4 time. The score consists of two staves. The melody is written on a treble clef staff with a key signature of one flat. The lyrics are written below the notes.

Ó mal-ko moyá - ó mal-ko moyá - ó mal-ko moyá - ó mal-ko moyá -
Ó mal-ko moyá - ó mal-ko moyá - ó mal-ko moyá - ó mal-ko moyá -

Stara Pianina

Musical score for 'Stara Pianina' in 2/4 time. The score consists of two staves. The melody is written on a treble clef staff with a key signature of one flat. The lyrics are written below the notes.

Stara pi-a-ni-na - Stara pi-a-ni-na - Stara pi-a-ni-na - Stara pi-a-ni-na -
Stara pi-a-ni-na - Stara pi-a-ni-na - Stara pi-a-ni-na - Stara pi-a-ni-na -

Nasadil ye Dadó

Musical score for 'Nasadil ye Dadó' in 2/4 time. The score consists of two staves. The melody is written on a treble clef staff with a key signature of one flat. The lyrics are written below the notes.

Nasadil ye dadó - Nasadil ye dadó - Nasadil ye dadó - Nasadil ye dadó -
Nasadil ye dadó - Nasadil ye dadó - Nasadil ye dadó - Nasadil ye dadó -

Macedonian!

Musical score for 'Macedonian!' in 2/4 time. The score consists of two staves. The melody is written on a treble clef staff with a key signature of one flat. The lyrics are written below the notes. The tempo markings 'Moderato' and 'Allegro' are placed above the first and second staves respectively.

Moderato Allegro
Ma-cedonian! Ma-cedonian! Ma-cedonian! Ma-cedonian!
Ma-cedonian! Ma-cedonian! Ma-cedonian! Ma-cedonian!