**Amy Beach**

**Born**: September 5th, 1867, Henniker, New Hampshire  
**Died**: December 27th, 1944 New York City, New York  
**Period of Music**: Late Romantic/Modern Era

“It has happened more than once that a composition has come to me, ready-made as it were, between the demands of other work.” – Amy Beach

**Biography:**

Amy Beach was born in Henniker, New Hampshire to a musical family. Her sister taught voice and piano, and her niece studied music in New York, Boston, and Paris. Amy showed every sign of being a child prodigy. She could sing 40 songs accurately by age 1, and by age 2 she could improvise counter-melodies easily. By age 3, she had taught herself how to read. She composed three waltzes for piano without being in front of a piano at age 4, and could play four-part hymns by ear. The family struggled to keep up with her musical interests and demands. Her mother sang and played for her, but attempted to prevent young Amy from playing the family piano herself, believing that to indulge the child's wishes in this respect would damage parental authority.

Amy began formal piano lessons at age 6 and made her concert debut at age 16 at Boston’s Music Hall. The following year, she starred in the final performance of the Boston Symphony’s 1884-85 season. In addition to studying piano, Amy studied harmony and counterpoint with Junius W. Hill for one year in 1884. This was her only formal training in composition. She collected every book she could find on music theory, composition, and orchestration and taught herself counterpoint, fugue, double-fugues, composition, and orchestration. She even went as far as to translating Gevaert’s and Berlioz’s French treatises on orchestration into English so she could learn from these masters. During this time, she produced a substantial body of work including her Mass in E op.5, an 85-minute work for chorus and orchestra. Almost all of her compositions were performed and published, but her art songs and choral music are especially well known.

After her husband’s death in 1910 and her mother’s in 1911, Beach went to Europe to establish a reputation there as both performer and composer as well as to promote the sale of her own works. She gave recitals in German cities, playing her sonata and quintet and accompanying her songs; her Gaelic symphony and concertos were performed in Leipzig, Hamburg, and Berlin. Beach gained respect for the musical ability of the Americans among Europeans. At the outbreak of World War I, Beach returned to the United States with dozens of concerts already scheduled across the nation.

As a composer, she was highly disciplined and could produce large-scale works in a few days. Beach was also energetic in the promotion of her compositions, arranging for performances as soon as her works were completed. As a pianist, she had a virtuosic technique and an extraordinary memory.

Beach’s earliest works demonstrate her ability to create lush flowing phrases, beautiful melodies, and sensitive relationships between music and text. Art song is at the core of her style and she even used some of the melodies from
her songs as themes in her instrumental works. Her remarkable ear for harmony and tonal color is also apparent from her earliest compositions. As her compositional style developed, she increasingly used chromaticism and displayed the influences of the late Romantics, as well American and European folk music.

In her life, she wrote over 150 pieces including songs, piano music, chamber music, symphonies, large works for chorus and orchestra, and one opera, *Cabildo*. Her creativity allowed her to freely make use of European musical tradition while avoiding a restricted American Style of the time. Heart disease caused Beach to retire to New York City in 1940 and led to her death in 1944.

**Quick Facts:**
- Beginning in the 1880s, she was a frequent piano soloist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra.
- She was the only female member of the Second New England School of classical composers, a group that included Arthur Foote and Horatio Parker.
- She often published music under the pseudonym Mrs. H.H.A. Beach, after her husband Dr. Henry Harris Aubrey Beach, who wanted to limit her public performance, to promote his name and not her own.
- Amy Beach is considered the first major American Composer.

**Selected Compositions for Listening:**

Spotify Playlist URL: [https://tinyurl.com/amyblisten](https://tinyurl.com/amyblisten)

- Symphony in E Minor, op. 32, Gaelic
  - I: Allegro con fuoco
  - II: Alla Siciliana; Allegro vivace
  - III: Lento con molto espressione
  - IV: Allegro di molto
- Piano Concerto in C-Sharp Minor, Op. 45: II. Scherzo: Vivaco (Perpetuum mobile)
- Grand Mass in E-Flat Major
  - Gloria
  - Graduale
- Romance, Op. 23
- 3 Songs, Op.21: No. 1: Chanson d’amour
- Children’s Album, Op. 36: No. 1: Minuet
- Sonata for Piano and Violin in A Minor, Op. 34: I. Allegro moderato
- Trio for Violin, Violoncello, and Piano, Op. 150 – Allegro con brio
- Three Shakespeare Songs, Op. 37: II. Take, O take those lips away

**Learn More about Amy Beach:**