



**GRAND VALLEY
STATE UNIVERSITY**[®]

**DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC,
THEATRE, AND DANCE**

**GVSU at St. Mark's:
The Music of Amy Beach**

5:00 P.M.

Sunday, February 19, 2023
St. Mark's Episcopal Church
Grand Rapids, MI

Program

Prelude on an Old Folk Tune (“The Fair Hills of Eire, O”)

Gregory Crowell, organ

Three Flower Songs, Op. 31

The Clover

The Yellow Daisy

The Bluebell

Anima Vocal Ensemble
Kathleen Wallace, conductor

From Sonata for Violin and Piano in A Minor, Op. 34

IV. Allegro con fuoco

Letitia Jap, violin
Sookkyung Cho, piano

Ah, Love by a Day!, Op. 44

Haste, o Beloved, Op. 29

The Wandering Knight, Op. 29

Matt Ross, baritone
Lindsey O'Donnell, soprano
Andrew Lenhart, piano

Trio op. 150

Allegro

Lento espressivo

Allegro con brio

Sookkyung Cho, piano
Letitia Jap, violin
Pablo Mahave-Veglia, cello

Program Notes

Amy Marcy Cheney (1867-1944) was born in West Henniker, New Hampshire, where her father's family owned a paper mill. She demonstrated great musical ability when she was very young; as her biographer Adrienne Fried Block writes, by the age of one, she was able to hum forty melodies "accurately and always in the key that she first heard them." Although her mother did not allow the child to play the piano until she was four, Amy nevertheless developed musically, improvising lines to harmonize melodies. Her family moved to Massachusetts, where she grew up in and near Boston. Amy learned piano first from her mother and then from Ernst Perabo and Carl Baermann. Both her teachers had studied in Germany, and Baermann was a student and close friend of Franz Liszt. While she had fine teachers at home, Amy was not sent to Europe to further her education, as were many young American musicians at that time. Beginning at age fifteen, she began performing in Boston and nearby. She appeared as a soloist with an orchestra in 1883, performing Chopin and Moscheles, and presented her first public piano recital in 1884. These performances were well attended and favorably reviewed; Miss Cheney's performing career was off to a good start.

The following year, however, at the age of eighteen, Amy married the renowned surgeon Henry Harris Aubrey Beach, who was forty-three. While her husband strongly supported her career as a composer, he found it inappropriate for a wife in genteel society to perform for money. She agreed upon their marriage that she would not teach piano and that any performing fees would be donated to charity. During her marriage, she limited her public performances, giving just one solo recital per year, though she did appear in chamber concerts and played as a soloist with the Boston Symphony when invited. With these limitations on her performing life, Beach dedicated most of her energy to composing. Having had very little formal training in music theory and composition, she designed a rigorous system to teach herself by collecting "every book she could locate on theory, composition, and orchestration," and even

translating some of them herself. She also collected many musical scores for her studies, bringing scores along to concerts she attended.

Compared to other women composers of the nineteenth century, in some ways Beach had more support. Her husband was proud of her work and status as a composer, and many musical leaders supported her and furthered her career. These included conductors Theodore Thomas and Carl Zerrahn; composers John Knowles Paine, George Whitefield Chadwick, and Arthur Foote; performers Franz Kneisel and Adelina Patti, and her longtime publisher Arthur P. Schmidt. Being financially comfortable and childless, the young woman was able to devote her time to composition rather than domestic tasks.

Even so, social attitudes and expectations about women clearly affected her life and career. This began with her parents' limitation of her musical training and continued with her husband's stipulations about what she could and could not do. As frequently happens to women in the arts, her work was often viewed through the prism of gender. For example, in 1893, Beach composed an invited work, *Festival jubilate*, for the opening ceremony at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. However, choral conductor William Tomlins suddenly declared that "as a woman [Beach] was very good, but . . . of ordinary merit compared to men," and the work was performed in the Women's Building instead.

A turning point in Beach's life was her husband's unexpected death in 1910. In 1911, she sailed for Europe, where she remained through the first months of World War I. Her traveling companion for much of her time in Europe was the American soprano Marcella Craft, who played star roles at the Munich Royal Opera and was Richard Strauss's favorite soprano in the role of Salome. While in Europe, Beach changed her professional name from "Mrs. H. H. A. Beach"—which had served her well in Boston, where her husband was well-known and highly respected—to "Amy Beach."

Beach settled in Munich but also traveled widely, networking with other musicians and arranging performances of her music. Eventually, she returned to the concert stage as a solo performer, making her European debut in Dresden in October 1912. She gave concerts in Munich—one with the Munich Quartet, conducted by Strauss—and also in Breslau, Berlin, and Hamburg. She also continued to compose, with some works inspired by her travels, such as the *Tyrolean Valse-Fantasia*. While she very much enjoyed her European experiences, the growing instability as the war began obliged her to return to the United States in September 1914.

The war years brought Beach great recognition and success, with performances by her and of her music all over the United States. She moved from Boston to New York to San Francisco before settling in Hillsborough, New Hampshire, close to her birthplace. Her music and position as a noted American composer were celebrated. Among many such programs was one all-Beach concert held in January 1918 at the Saint Cecilia Society in Grand Rapids.

From 1921 through 1941, Beach spent a month every summer at the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire, a community set up as an artists' retreat by Marian MacDowell, widow of composer Edward MacDowell. This was a stimulating and fruitful place for her, where she composed many works and interacted with writers, visual artists, and musicians. She remained very active until the last few years of her life, when illness slowed her down.

Musically, Beach can be classified mostly as a late Romantic composer, strongly influenced by the Victorian world in which she grew up. Her lack of formal training led her to model her music closely on that of other composers that she admired, particularly when she was tackling a new genre such as the mass or symphony. At the same time, her individuality shines through in her expressive output. Her gift for harmony was notable. Throughout her compositional life, Beach was drawn to folk tunes; she wrote pieces based on Scottish, Irish, Balkan, Inuit, and Black Creole melodies. While she expressed a dislike of some modernist techniques

that dominated the musical world in her later decades, she also experimented with dissonance and metric displacement, as will be heard today in her Prelude on an Old Folk Tune for organ, her last published work.

The Prelude on an Old Folk Tune, composed in 1942, is a setting and recomposition of an Irish melody. She had already written a piano piece on “The Fair Hills of Eiré, O!” as her Op. 91. This is her only work for solo organ.

In *Three Flower Songs*, Beach set poetry by Helen Deland, a novelist who was a member of the women’s lunch club to which Beach also belonged. As Block explains, Beach selected poems “that are at once sentimental yet comment wryly on love and betrayal.”

The Violin Sonata is in A minor, and its final movement is in A major. This work was composed in 1896. Beach played the premiere performance in 1897 with Franz Kneisel on violin, and the work had many performances in the next several years in the U.S. and Europe. Notably, famed Belgian violinist Eugene Ysayë performed it in Paris.

The songs of Opus 29 were composed in 1894, and those of Opus 44, settings of Robert Browning, in 1900.

Beach composed the Piano Trio in fifteen days during her stay at the MacDowell Colony in 1938. She reused structures and melodies from some of her previous works as inspiration here, including the “Gaelic” Symphony, the song “Allein,” and the Inuit song “The Returning Hunter” that she had used in her piano suite *Eskimos*.

For additional reading, see:

Adrienne Fried Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. (All quoted passages above are from this book.)

Adrienne Fried Block and E. Douglas Bomberger, "Beach (Cheney), Amy March" in *Oxford Music Online*

amybeach.org

Upcoming MTD Events

February 20 at 7:30 PM - Tuba and Euphonium Chamber Concert. KBB
February 24 at 7:30 PM - *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*. LAT
February 25 at 7:30 PM - *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*. LAT
February 26 at 2:00 PM - *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*. LAT
February 26 at 3:00 PM - FrenchFest #3. Central Reformed Church
February 27 at 7:30 PM - FrenchFest #3. SVS PAC
February 28 at 7:30 PM - Jazz Ensembles. LAT, PAC
March 2 at 7:30 PM - Wind Symphony and Concert Band. LAT, PAC
March 19 at 3:00 PM - FrenchFest #3. First Reformed Church, Holland
March 20 at 7:00 PM - Art Gallery Composition Competition. LAT, PAC
march 21 at 7:30 PM - Guest Artist: Kwan Yi, Piano. SVS, PAC
March 24 at 7:30 PM - *The Importance of Being Earnest*. KBB, PAC
March 25 at 4:00 PM - Faculty Artist: Abigail Walsh, Flute. CDC, GVSU
March 25 at 7:30 PM - *The Importance of Being Earnest*. KBB, PAC
March 26 at 2:00 PM - *The Importance of Being Earnest*. KBB, PAC
March 26 at 3:00 PM - FrenchFest #4. Alger Park Church, Grand Rapids
March 27 at 7:30 PM - FrenchFest #4. SVS, PAC
March 30 at 7:30 PM - Faculty Artist: Alex Wilson, Trumpet. SVS, PAC
March 30 at 7:30 PM - *The Importance of Being Earnest*. KBB, PAC
March 31 at 7:30 PM - *The Importance of Being Earnest*. KBB, PAC
April 1 at 7:30 PM - *The Importance of Being Earnest*. KBB, PAC
April 1 at 7:30 PM - Choir Concert. St. Cecilia's Music Center. GR
April 2 at 2:00 PM - *The Importance of Being Earnest*. KBB, PAC
April 2 at 4:00 PM - Early Music Ensemble. SVS, PAC
April 3 at 7:30 PM - GVSU Trombone Ensemble. LAT, PAC



**GRAND VALLEY
STATE UNIVERSITY**[®]

**DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC,
THEATRE, AND DANCE**

For updated information on Music, Theatre, and Dance events, please visit
www.gvsu.edu/mtd.

If you are interested in supporting Music, Theatre, and Dance programs,
please consider contacting Grand Valley's University Development Office at
616-331-6000 or universitydevelopment@gvsu.edu.

**The use of cameras, video cameras, or recording devices is strictly
prohibited. Please remember to turn off your cell phones.**