

Scottish Legend, Op. 54, No. 1

A Hermit Thrush at Morn, Op. 92, No. 2

Fire-Flies  
from *Four Sketches*, Op. 15, No. 4

In Autumn  
from *Four Sketches*, Op. 15, No. 1

Bal masque, Op. 22

Arctic Night  
from *Eskimos: Four Characteristic Pieces*, Op. 64, No. 1

Menuet Italien  
from *Trois morceaux caractéristiques*, Op. 28, No. 2

From Blackbird Hills, Op. 83

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84088925970  
HL00121629



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ISBN 978-1-4803-5286-5



9781480352865

# Amy Marcy Cheney Beach

( 1 8 6 7 – 1 9 4 4 )

Amy Marcy Cheney was born on September 5, 1867 in Henniker, New Hampshire. Amy's mother was Clara Imogene Marcy, a talented singer and pianist. Her father, Charles Abbott, entered college at age 16, graduated from Bates College and became a paper manufacturer and importer.

Amy could sing 40 tunes when she was only one year old. Before the age of two, she could harmonize an alto line with her mother. Her parents soon realized that their child was gifted. It was discovered Amy associated colors with certain tonal areas; she would ask her mother to play the "pink music." A piece in E-flat Major was pink to her; the color violet was the key of D-flat Major. Amy was reading by age three and memorizing lengthy poems. At age four she composed three waltzes in her head while visiting her grandparents. Upon arriving home, she amazed her mother by playing them. Soon Amy began lessons with her mother and when just seven years old played a Beethoven sonata and other pieces in recital.

The family moved to Boston and Amy began formal piano lessons with Mr. Ernst Perabo. At the age of ten, she went along with her mother to visit relatives in California. There, a friend of the family found out that Amy had perfect pitch and took her out in the country to help notate bird calls. During one day they notated twenty different bird calls. The notations of the many California larks became Amy's contribution to ornithological science. The notations were included along with an article in a scientific journal.

When Amy was 16 she made her debut with the Boston Symphony Orchestra performing Mosceles' Concerto in G minor at the Boston Music Hall. The same year, Amy's first published composition was the vocal solo "The Rainy Day," with words by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, composed four years earlier. Amy's next piano teacher was Karl Barmann, a pupil of Franz Liszt. Amy also took harmony with Junius W. Hill, an organist, composer, and later a professor at Wellesley College.

On December 2, 1885 she married the famous Boston surgeon and Harvard Medical School graduate, Dr. Henry Harris Aubrey Beach, and thereafter was called Mrs. H.H.A. Beach. Her husband, more than twice her age, played piano, sang, and wrote poems. Amy Beach spent most of her time composing music during 25 years of marriage. She gave a few recitals for charity but her husband forbade her to teach piano. She studied many treatises on music, sometimes translating them from French and German, and had copies of most everything ever written on composition, theory, and orchestration available at the time. Beach studied on her own and was extremely disciplined. Soon after marriage, she began composing the "Mass in E-flat," premiered by the Handel & Haydn Society in Boston, the first composition by a woman performed there.

# About the Music

## **Scottish Legend, Op. 54, No. 1**

This lovely piece was first published in 1903 by Arthur P. Schmidt Company. Beach captured the essence of a Scottish folk melody in her original composition. The first sixteen measures express a feeling of rich harmonic texture in D minor. The animated middle section is in the parallel major, returning to D minor again to bring the lyrical legend to perfect closure.

## **A Hermit Thrush at Morn, Op. 92, No. 2**

This enchanting piece was inspired by a hermit thrush singing perched in a tree outside Beach's studio at the MacDowell Colony. It was during the summer of 1921, the first time that she had come to this 400-acre haven to compose at the invitation of Marian MacDowell, the widow of Edward MacDowell. The actual bird call can be heard throughout this peaceful piano solo.

## **Fire-Flies from *Four Sketches*, Op. 15, No. 4**

This miniature tone poem was first published in 1892 by Arthur P. Schmidt Company. It is a dazzling show piece with shimmering descending thirds. The famous concert pianist Josef Hofmann often played this work in recitals.

## **In Autumn from *Four Sketches*, Op. 15, No. 1**

"Feuillages jaunissants sur les gazons epars." ("Yellowing foliage scattered on the grass.") This line of French poetry by Alphonse de Lamartine appeared at the top of the music. Beach celebrates the fall season while painting a musical picture of colored leaves dancing in the wind.

## **Bal masque, Op. 22**

This waltz was published in 1894 by Arthur Schmidt Company. As a child, one of the first pieces Amy learned was a Strauss waltz she heard her mother playing at the piano. Waltzes were among the first pieces she composed at the age of four. "Bal masque" (masked ball) has all the excitement of a Grande Ball in Vienna, opening with a long trill and introduction, giving the dancers time to get out on the dance floor. The piece begins in G Major, the key Beach identified with the color red, and modulates to E-flat Major music with the melody in the bass. A spectacular modulation occurs at the "golden mean" bringing the music back to the key of G, dancing all the way to the end.

## **Arctic Night from *Eskimos: Four Characteristic Pieces*, Op. 64, No. 1**

This piece was published in 1907 by Arthur Schmidt Company. It is the first movement in the Eskimos Suite. This slow expressive piece in C minor is based on an Inuit Native American folk song. Beach played this suite at a recital on July 28, 1917 in Concord, New Hampshire after a brief lecture on Eskimo music.

# Important Dates in the Life of Amy Beach

- 1867 Born September 5 in Henniker, New Hampshire
- 1876 Began six years of piano lessons with Johann Ernst Perabo, a German pianist who taught privately and at the New England Conservatory
- 1881 Began studying harmony with Junius Welch Hill at a private school
- 1882 Began piano lessons with Carl Baermann, a student of Franz Liszt
- 1883 "The Rainy Day" becomes first published composition (Oliver Ditson Company)
- 1883 Makes piano debut October 24 at the Music Hall in Boston performing a piece by Chopin and a concerto by Ignaz Moscheles
- 1885 Performed Chopin's Concerto in F minor with the Boston Symphony, March 28
- 1885 Beginning of a thirty-year exclusive publishing arrangement with Arthur P. Schimdt following the publication of "With Violets," Op. 1, No. 1
- 1885 Marries Dr. H. H. A. Beach at Trinity Church in Boston, December 2
- 1890 First major work, *Mass* in E-flat Major, Op. 5 was published, premiered on February 7, 1892 by the Handel and Haydn Society (This was the first time the group performed a work by a woman composer)
- 1893 Receives a commission to compose a piece for the dedication ceremonies of the Women's Building at The World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago
- 1893 Premiered *Romance*, Op. 23 for violin and piano with America's first violin virtuoso Maud Powell, July 6
- 1895 Charles Cheney (Amy's father) dies, July 26
- 1896 The Boston Symphony premieres her "Gaelic" Symphony, conducted by Emil Paur, to whom the work is dedicated, October 31
- 1900 Premiere of Piano Concerto in C-sharp minor by the Boston Symphony, April 7
- 1904 Completion of "Balkan Variations," Op. 60
- 1910 Dr. H.H.A. Beach dies, June 28