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# Amy Beach: Tenacious Spirit

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Amy Beach; Tenacious Spirit

by

Ariel Foshay Bacon  
a BA Project  
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Faculty of the Music and Art Department  
in Partial Fulfillment of  
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of  
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Committee:

\_\_\_\_\_ Chair of Faculty Committee

\_\_\_\_\_ Faculty member

\_\_\_\_\_ Chair of Department

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Spring/2012  
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Cedarville, Ohio

Amy Beach; Tenacious Sprit

A lecture-recital presented to the faculty of the Music and Art Department of Cedarville University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

By

Ariel Foshay Bacon

Chair of Faculty Committee:  
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## Abstract

Amy Beach; Tenacious Spirit

Ariel Bacon Bachelor of Music degree

Cedarville University 03/12

Chair: Name of Chair of Faculty Committee

Nineteenth-century composer Amy Beach is one of the first of her gender to successfully compose in the large orchestral forms. She was also one of the first American musicians to be trained entirely in the U.S and receive international acclaim. Incredibly, these achievements took place against the backdrop of a patriarchal society that confined women to the domestic sphere. Also, in the musical community, large orchestral forms were considered the exclusive creative property of men and any women who attempted them were immediately ascribed the status of a dilettante. In order to illustrate Amy's unique place in this setting, I compare her life and accomplishments to that of a well-known European contemporary, Clara Schumann. Amy's life is not the narrative of a feminist overcoming the patriarchal system, but one of a woman who used her social advantage to pursue the art she loved with a determined and humble spirit.

Amy Beach was one of the first woman American performer-composers to gain acclaim domestically and abroad. She was born during a time when music history textbooks taught that “all creative work is well-known as being the exclusive work of men,” and woman musicians were automatically ascribed the status of a dilettante.<sup>1</sup> She was also one of the first in her gender to break through the stereotype to successfully compose in the larger, orchestral genres that were exclusively considered as ‘manly’ or ‘virile’ forms.<sup>2</sup> A prolific composer, her list of works boasts more than three hundred pieces, including a symphony, a piano concerto, a concert mass, numerous cantatas, chamber music, and an opera.<sup>3</sup> She was a prodigy comparable to Mozart, an astounding performer, and had many successful American and European tours, often performing her own music. Though her career was definitely aided by the women’s rights movement, it is more likely that her upbringing, social economic freedom and tenacity of spirit were the main reasons for her great success.<sup>4</sup> Her life is not the narrative of a feminist overcoming the patriarchal system, but one of a woman who used her social advantages to pursue the art that she loved with a determined and humble spirit.

A comparison between Amy Beach and a well known European contemporary, Clara Schumann, illustrates this unique historical development. Both

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<sup>1</sup> Jane Bowers and Judith Tick, eds., *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150-1950* (New York: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 8.

<sup>2</sup> Eugene Gates, “Mrs. H. H. A. Beach: American Symphonist,” *The Kapralova Society Journal* 8, no. 2 (2010): 3.

<sup>3</sup> Burnet C. Tuthill, “Mrs. H. H. A. Beach,” *The Musical Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (July 1940): 306.

<sup>4</sup> Gates, 7.

women were prodigies, performers, composers, wives, and widows, and their careers were shaped by their similar life events. Other contributions to their development were the social pressures from the patriarchal structure in which they lived in and the common beliefs about the biological differences between men and women. Both women responded courageously to the obstacles their gender conferred upon them, but it was Amy Beach who used the resources of her social sphere, working within its restraints to rise above the dilettante stereotype and set an example for women composers in the twentieth-century. The backgrounds and social attitudes of both composers must be compared in order to ascertain how—though their backgrounds were so similar—one was regarded mainly as a composer and the other a performer.

Amy Beach and Clara Schumann possessed similar musical gifts. Amy Marcy Cheney was born in Henniker, New Hampshire on September 5, 1867. The young girl showed an extremely precocious musical sense by her first year, when she could hum with accuracy up to forty tunes.<sup>5</sup> If any alteration were made she would object vehemently, showcasing her extraordinary memory.<sup>6</sup> She was aurally sensitive to the emotional aspects of melody and harmony. In fact, Burnet C. Tuthill in his 1940 biography of Amy Beach commented, “sad tunes affected her [Amy] markedly,” and her mother “punished her not with a spanking but by playing to her Gottschalk’s ‘Last Hope.’”<sup>7</sup> When she was two, she showed the portent of her compositional future by improvising the alto part to her mother’s soprano while she was being rocked to

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<sup>5</sup> Lindsey E. Merrill, “Mrs. H. H. A. Beach: Composer,” *Helicon Nine* 6 (Spring 1892): 85.

<sup>6</sup> GERALYN SCHULTZ, “Influences of Cultural Ideals of Womanhood On the Musical Career of Mrs. H. H. A. Beach” (Master’s thesis, University of Wyoming, 1994), 9.

<sup>7</sup> Tuthill, 298.

sleep.<sup>8</sup> By four, before she had received any piano instruction, she started to play hymn tunes from church in four-part harmony and always in the same key that she had heard them. As to when she first began to compose, there is a discrepancy in the documents. According to Eugene Gates's biography, she composed three waltzes at the age of four ("Mama's Waltz," "Snowflake Waltz" and "Marlborough Waltz") without the use of a piano while visiting her grandfather's farm in Maine.<sup>9</sup> Tuthill's earlier biography states that it wasn't until after she started lessons with her mother that she began to compose.<sup>10</sup> However, according to Amy herself, she would compose pieces in her head to go with the rhymes in her Mother Goose book, when she was "scarcely more than a baby." Beach commented on her outstanding proclivity later, saying, "I could not help thinking music. It was in my blood, it was the daily talk."<sup>11</sup>

Clara Wieck was born some fifty years earlier than Amy on September 13, 1819 in Leipzig, Germany. Her mother, Marianne Tromlitz, was a gifted singer and pianist, and her father, Friedrich Wieck, was a music merchant and brilliant yet brutal musical pedagogue.<sup>12</sup> Tromlitz was Wieck's first successful student and sung at the weekly concerts at the prestigious Gewandhaus in Leipzig. Wieck also had a successful music business. Unlike Amy however, Clara's domestic surroundings were not harmonious. Her parents were constantly busy with students, performances and

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<sup>8</sup> Gates, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. Mama's waltz is remarkable in its length (180 mm.) formal organization, and harmony.

<sup>10</sup> Tuthill, 299.

<sup>11</sup> Amy Beach, as quoted in Adrienne Fried Block, "A 'Veritable Autobiography'? Amy Beach's Piano Concerto in C-Sharp Minor, op. 45," *The Musical Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 398.

<sup>12</sup> Nancy B. Reich, "Clara Schumann," in *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150-1950*, eds. Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (New York: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 252.

business matters, and Clara was left in the care of her nurse. Her parents separated, and in 1825, the Wieck's marriage devolved into divorce. This left Clara in the care of her father, because the Saxon law considered children the legal property of the father.<sup>13</sup> In that same year, Clara's nursemaid Johanna Strobel was dismissed from the household. So from a very young age, Clara was not only motherless but also entirely left alone. The implication of these early events is described by Nancy B. Reich and Anne Burton in their biographical article, "Clara Schumann: Old Sources, New Readings." They speculate that Clara's tumultuous childhood, the tension of the Wieck's marriage and the forced separation from her mother and nursemaid, developed in Clara a "mutism caused by emotional conflict."<sup>14</sup> Clara did not speak a word until she was past the age of four, and even after that she seemed to have a difficult time comprehending speech. It was commonly rumored in Leipzig that Clara was "slow" or hard of hearing.<sup>15</sup> Despite this, her father began to informally teach her piano when she was four. According to Wieck, she surprised him and learned rather quickly, playing exercises and simple dance accompaniments by ear.<sup>16</sup> It seemed that though she may have trouble with speech, she had no issue at all with notes. Wieck commented that Clara developed an acutely sensitive ear because of an early exposure to the music performed continuously in their home.<sup>17</sup> Music would be the main form of solace in Clara's life. She later wrote in a letter to violinist Joseph

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<sup>13</sup> Nancy B. Reich, *Clara Schumann, the Artist and the Woman* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 34-35.

<sup>14</sup> Nancy B. Reich and Anna Burton, "Clara Schumann: Old Sources, New Readings," *The Musical Quarterly* 70, no. 3 (Summer 1984): 339-341.

<sup>15</sup> Reich, 37.

<sup>16</sup> Reich, "Clara Schumann," in *Women Making Music*, eds. Bowers and Tick, 254.

<sup>17</sup> Joan Chissell, *Clara Schumann, A Dedicated Spirit: A Study of Her Life and Work* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Co., 1983), 1.

Joachim that the piano was “mein alter, treuer Freund.”<sup>18</sup> Clara soon began formal lessons with her father, his rigorous and domineering tutelage taking over every aspect of her childhood. Within four years of study, Clara was giving private performances and had established a reputation as a prodigy.

Music was a constant in the Cheney household as well. Amy’s mother, Clara Imogene Marcy Cheney, was also a talented pianist and singer. Amy’s aunt, Emma Frances (“Franc”) Chaney, was a contralto and taught voice and piano, and was a regular visitor at the Cheney home. Amy’s grandmother, who lived with the Cheney’s, was a high soprano and sang often in church and at home.<sup>19</sup> What delighted Amy the most was to hear her mother’s playing. She would often sit still for hours, listening to her mother rehearse. It seemed that Amy linked keys with certain colors, as she would demand her mother play certain pieces like “the pink or blue music.”<sup>20</sup> Amy’s formal education began when she was six. She studied piano with her mother for two years, having three lessons a week and strict practice times.<sup>21</sup> Access to the piano was controlled in an attempt to discipline Amy’s willful inclination for music.<sup>22</sup> However, in that short span of time she mastered the Czerny and Heller etudes, the Harmonious Blacksmith Suite by Handel, the Chopin waltzes and all thirty-two of the Beethoven sonatas. She also learned transposition and

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<sup>18</sup> Translation: “My old, faithful friend.” Clara Schumann, as quoted in Reich and Burton, 343.

<sup>19</sup> Adrienne Fried Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian: The Life and Work of an American Composer, 1867-1944* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, USA, 2000), 19-20.

<sup>20</sup> Amy Beach, as quoted in Adrienne Fried Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian: The Life and Work of an American Composer, 1867-1944* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, USA, 2000), 10.

<sup>21</sup> Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian: The Life and Work of an American Composer, 1867-1944* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, USA, 2000), 11.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

notation.<sup>23</sup> In 1874 she gave her first concert at the age of seven, despite her mother's hesitance. This event, though somewhat trivial compared to the breadth of her performing and compositional career, is significant in that it was her debut as a performer and as a composer. She played a Chopin piece as well as one of her own waltzes at the Unitarian Church in Chelsea, and though the concert received a rapturous reception, Mrs. Cheney determined that there would be no more public appearances.<sup>24</sup> This was a way of redirecting Amy's path away from that of an exploited prodigy, but it also could have been a means of protecting Amy from the gross public attention that would come with the display of her incredible talents.

When the Cheney's moved to Boston in 1875, Amy was afforded the benefit of its musical and intellectual environment. She was allowed to experience the musical richness of Boston by attending night concerts.<sup>25</sup> In the search of a new piano instructor, Amy's talent was shown to the foremost German-trained musicians in the Boston area. They enthusiastically suggested that she could and should study abroad at a European conservatory. This created a circle of Bostonians who were impressed and interested in Amy's development and future debut.<sup>26</sup> Even Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the famous poet, took interest. He wrote a letter to Amy's new piano instructor, expressing his desire that she study in Europe.<sup>27</sup> But her parents exerted their control yet again and rejected the idea, due to her emotional and sensitive nature.

Adrienne Fried Block, a prolific scholar and writer on Amy Beach's life and career,

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<sup>23</sup> Schultz, 10-11.

<sup>24</sup> Adrienne Fried Block, "A 'Veritable Autobiography'? Amy Beach's Piano Concerto in C-Sharp Minor, op. 45," *The Musical Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 399.

<sup>25</sup> Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 23.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>27</sup> Schultz, 11.

offers commentary on the Cheney's decision, proposing that this was due largely to the fact of Amy's gender. European study would mean that Amy was being groomed for a career, but that would not be compatible with the appropriate domestic life planned for her. The health reasons given were also probably a reflection on the prevailing societal attitudes that girls were delicate creatures, needing to be shielded from unnecessary exertion in order to aid proper sexual maturity. After all, their most important role in life would be to bear and raise their children.<sup>28</sup> Whatever reasons her parents had for keeping Amy in Boston, and however biased by gender, it gave Amy a unique place in history. Amy Beach became the first American composer born and trained natively in the United States to receive international acclaim.<sup>29</sup>

Paradoxically, though Amy was not to be groomed for a profession in music, her parents still made sure that she received the finest instruction. In 1876, at the age of nine, training was continued with German-trained Ernst Perabo, who taught privately and at the New England Conservatory, until she was fifteen. Amy then went on to study with Carl Baermann for piano, and with Junius W. Hill for theory.<sup>30</sup> The latter, however, was not comprehensive, as she was given only one year of formal training in harmony and counterpoint technique. The prevailing attitudes about the ability of women to compose made it unnecessary for any intensive theoretical study.<sup>31</sup> As a result of this erroneous presupposition Beach showed admirable determination and taught herself the necessary tools of composition. She subjected

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<sup>28</sup> Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 22-23.

<sup>29</sup> Tuthill, 306.

<sup>30</sup> Schultz, 12.

<sup>31</sup> Gates, 2.

herself to the “systematic study of counterpoint, fugue, musical form and orchestration.”<sup>32</sup> She transcribed Bach’s fugues from memory, voice by voice. She attended concerts, not simply for entertainment, but in order to be able to transcribe the music with proper instrumentation and compare it to the score.<sup>33</sup> She also translated Berlioz’s and Gervart’s books on theory into English.<sup>34</sup> Beach later explained her approach, “I possess about every treatise that has ever been written on the subjects of harmony, theory, counterpoint, double counterpoint, fugue and instrumentation....I have a good knowledge of French and German, and have made exhaustive studies of works in these languages. I can repeat whole chapters from Berlioz’s delightful book on instrumentation.”<sup>35</sup> Though Amy succeeded in this venture, she later wrote that she did not recommend the process, as it was too difficult.

Young Amy’s parents—especially her mother—wielded strict authority and control over her musical development. Though she showed unparalleled musical interest, Clara Cheney purposefully withheld instruction, even music itself from her child. Block writes that Mrs. Cheney, who was a Congregationalist and member of the Calvinist church, believed in the practice of withholding in order to teach children submission to their parents and to God. To be fair, young Amy was rather forceful in her pursuit of music. She would demand her mother and grandmother to sing in relay, one stopping once the other’s voice has tired, and she would get very angry if they

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<sup>32</sup> Merrill, 86.

<sup>33</sup> Gates, 2.

<sup>34</sup> Merrill, 86. These treatises on instrumentation and orchestration by Hector Berlioz and François-Auguste Gervart had not yet been translated into English.

<sup>35</sup> Beach, as quoted in Schultz, 12.

didn't "sing it clean." She would cry if the song wasn't to her liking, and would get upset at loud noises she couldn't control, like thunder and laughter. The remedy for this willfulness and disobedience was to withhold that which Amy loved and asked for the most. Block speculates further that this was a way to "reinforce the patriarchal order by placing home, husband, and children, rather than music, at the center of her life." Mrs. Cheney did not want to raise a prodigy, to indulge or to force her child to greatness. She wanted to raise a musician that was modest about her talents and humbly thankful to God for the gift he had bestowed upon her.<sup>36</sup>

Where Amy's parents took pains to give her a traditional education and shelter her from the public, Clara's education was radical, and her father's methods veered close to exploitation. Wieck's main aim was to produce a musical virtuoso. Clara's name, which Wieck picked, even means light and brilliance.<sup>37</sup> Clara's musical education was her father's way of showcasing his superior pedagogical techniques to the world.<sup>38</sup> He gave her a well-rounded and progressive musical education, giving her instruction in theory, harmony, counterpoint, composition, singing, score reading and violin, making sure she learned from the best that Leipzig and the surrounding areas had to offer.<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately, his practices were not all sane. Friedrich Wieck characterized himself as being caustic and blunt, and he was known to be violent if he was opposed. He neglected her general education and limited her social interaction. He also started a diary for Clara when she was seven, and supervised every entry until

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<sup>36</sup> Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 4-6.

<sup>37</sup> Chissell, 37.

<sup>38</sup> Reich, "Clara Schumann," in *Women Making Music*, eds. Bowers and Tick, 254.

<sup>39</sup> Reich and Burton, 345.

she was nineteen, often writing in it as if he were Clara himself. The diaries offer a wealth of information about the Wieck household and provide insight into Clara's upbringing. In them Wieck would make Clara write praise and condemnation to herself, and would have her copy business letters related to her concert appearances and bookings. It was a domineering and humiliating pedagogical tool, but it worked. According to Reich, Clara "learned how to manage a correspondence and arrange a concert tour. She also absorbed—through her eyes, ears, and fingers—her father's attitudes toward money and success and something of his competitive personality and belligerent spirit."<sup>40</sup>

The household was centered on music, and because of that, it was focused around Clara and her needs as a performer. Her younger brothers, who showed little of Clara's musical talent and willing disposition, were neglected to the point of abuse.<sup>41</sup> Three days into the honeymoon of her father's remarriage to Clementine Fechner in 1828, the couple and Clara went to Dresden so that Clara could perform.<sup>42</sup> Extraordinarily, the fact of Clara's gender was not a hindrance to Wieck. However, her time was never her own and she was not allowed to learn the more domestic arts that were considered proper for a young girl to learn. Evidence of this is shown later in life, in a letter to Robert Schumann, where Clara asks if his sister would live with them at the beginning of their marriage, so that she could learn some of the feminine arts.<sup>43</sup> She was not allowed to do anything that would distract her from music.

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<sup>40</sup> Reich, 43.

<sup>41</sup> Reich, "Clara Schumann," in *Women Making Music*, eds. Bowers and Tick, 255.

<sup>42</sup> Chissell, 8.

<sup>43</sup> Reich, "Clara Schumann," in *Women Making Music*, eds. Bowers and Tick, 256.

Wieck's approach toward his daughter's education was unusual considering the attitudes of the time towards the proper education for girls. Clara's education was specifically geared toward her becoming a career performer. Clara was brought up without experiencing the nurturing quality of a traditional family. Instead, her family was the circle of Leipzig musicians that met in her father's house, a circle that later introduced her to Schumann. A visitor of the Wieck's house would later write, "Every composer and virtuoso who came to Leipzig found that the morning or evening gatherings there offered the best opportunity to play and to hear new things."<sup>44</sup>

Amy and Clara's intriguing parallelism gives insight into the outcome of their compositional careers. While their natures were similar, their environments and the psychology of their education were not. Both Amy and Clara possessed similar gifts, were born into musical families that fostered their talent, and grew up advantageously in musical communities that accepted and encouraged their careers. However, while Amy was held back Clara was pushed, where one was sheltered the other was exploited, and where one spoke up for herself the other was told what to say.

There was always a tension between the potential of Amy's gift and the expectations of her parents and society. According to Geralyn Schultz, two cultural ideals on womanhood shaped Amy Beach's career: the Cult of True Womanhood and the Ideal of Real Womanhood.<sup>45</sup> In an age when eugenics was a common and accepted practice, The Cult of True Womanhood placed women in the domestic

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<sup>44</sup> Reich and Burton, 345.

<sup>45</sup> Schultz, 29. The Cult of True Womanhood is a social wave lasting from 1820 to 1860 and was identified by Barbara Welter in her book of the same title in 1966. The Ideal of Real Womanhood lasted from 1840 to 1880 and was identified by Frances Cogan in her book of the same title in 1989. Schultz argues that these ideas were disseminated and absorbed by the culture through most social means such as the media, literature, and religion.

sphere based on their biological traits and God given nature. It was a common belief that the woman's brain was less developed than a man's and that her nervous system was over developed due to her reproductive system. A young girl's mental and physical wellbeing had to be protected from exercise and critical thinking, both of which would be a detriment to her health. She was naturally "nurturing, moral, domestic, passive and affectionate" and the "four cardinal virtues of woman were... piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity."<sup>46</sup> Goethe's concept of womanhood similarly stated that femininity was delicate, graceful, refined and sensitive.<sup>47</sup> All of these beliefs contributed to the idea that a young woman should be submissive and allow others to decide the 'best' route for her life. This route usually included marriage. A young woman was expected to remain under her father's care until her marriage, when her husband would take over that responsibility.<sup>48</sup> Her primary role was to be a partner to her husband and the bearer of his children.<sup>49</sup> A career was outside of this sphere, as it would interfere with the primary responsibility of taking care of a family. A woman who rejected this model for a career was often criticized as being immoral and sexually deviant.<sup>50</sup>

The Ideal of Real Womanhood was similar to the Cult of True Womanhood. It stated that a woman's primary responsibility should be her husband and family, but the ideas of exercise and education differed greatly. The Real Womanhood view called for an active and intelligent woman, one that could be a respectful adage to

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>47</sup> Judith Tick "Passed Away Is the Piano Girl: Changes in American Musical Life, 1870-1900," in *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150-1050*, eds. Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (New York: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 337.

<sup>48</sup> Schultz, 32.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>50</sup> Wood, 295.

society and could develop equal yet different footing with men on an intellectual level. She was not passive, but a dynamic contributor to her family and society. If need be, she could take appropriate work outside the home in order to contribute to the family income or in the case of her husband's disability. In the end, this thorough education and activity was a way to attract a suitable husband and perhaps advance the social position of the family. Shultz explains that "the purpose for education was not to train a career, nor was it solely to benefit a woman. Neither should a woman neglect her health and family for intellectual pursuits, nor focus primarily on intellectual activity."<sup>51</sup> Music was simply another way in which a family could present their daughters as 'finished' for the best suitors. Its "mastery was for ornament and artifice, not for art."<sup>52</sup>

It is most likely that the Cheneys ascribed to the latter school of thought. Perhaps it was for the reason of finding Amy a suitable spouse that Clara Cheney gave her consent for a professional debut in 1883 at Boston Music Hall. At sixteen Amy successfully performed the G minor Concerto by Moscheles with the New York Orchestra and the Rondo in E-flat by Chopin.<sup>53</sup> Though she was not given top billing in the variety program, her performance was considered the highlight of the evening. To Amy, "life was beginning."<sup>54</sup> She received exceptionally positive reviews from several Boston papers and the New York Tribune, and surprisingly none made any reference to her gender. According to Block, this was because of her youth and in

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<sup>51</sup> Schultz, 34-40.

<sup>52</sup> Wood, 295.

<sup>53</sup> Schultz, 13.

<sup>54</sup> Beach, as quoted in Block, "A 'Veritable Autobiography'?" 399.

deference to Boston's unusually modern views about women artists.<sup>55</sup> Today, a successful debut such as Amy's would have meant acquiring a manager to handle her career and booking a tour stateside and abroad. But after her debut she was kept home in Boston, and her mother managed her appearances.<sup>56</sup> Once again, as if foreshadowing her future career, Amy published her first composition, a song titled *The Rainy Day*, in 1883 alongside her professional performance debut.<sup>57</sup> From 1883 to 1885 Amy performed in several concerts in the local area, the two most important being with Theodore Thomas's travelling orchestra, where she played Mendelssohn's Piano Concerto in D Minor, and the Boston Symphony Orchestra, where she played Chopin's Piano Concerto in F Minor. Both performances were again met with rapturous reviews. However, a critic from the *Transcript* wrote that the latter was a "thoroughly artistic, beautiful and brilliant performance," but that it was played "with a totality of conception that one seldom finds in players of her sex."<sup>58</sup> This was mild dissent, a put down on her sex masked as praise, indicative of the common belief about a woman's musical ability.

This common belief was given a voice by George Upton, in his 1880 book, *Women in Music*.<sup>59</sup> Upton believed that women lacked the intellectual and emotional reasoning required to create great music. He wrote that women were controlled by their emotion and thereby were inherently incapable of producing an inspired outward

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<sup>55</sup> Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 29-31.

<sup>56</sup> Block, "A 'Veritable Autobiography'?" 399.

<sup>57</sup> Gates, 2. A setting of Henry Longfellow's poem.

<sup>58</sup> Boston Evening Transcript, as quoted in Gates, 2.

<sup>59</sup> Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 40.

expression.<sup>60</sup> Block clarifies further, “while music was a language of feelings... it could only be transmuted into great art by intellect and the ability to think in abstract terms, the latter supposedly found wanting in women.”<sup>61</sup> This logic was partially due to the stereotype of ideal femininity as well as to the prevailing belief that music was exclusively a “masculine idea.”<sup>62</sup> The beliefs about the innate qualities of men and women engendered a sexist dichotomy in music. While the work of a male composer was in all respects considered the product of “conscious intellectual decisions,” the work of a female composer was a curiosity and “attributed to natural ability rather than developed skill.”<sup>63</sup> The aesthetic of music was ‘genderized.’ For example, if a woman performed with strength and force, her style was judged as being like a man’s.<sup>64</sup> According to 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.”<sup>65</sup>

After her debut with the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1885, the eighteen-year-old Amy was engaged and married to Henry Harris Aubrey Beach, a widowed physician who was twenty-five years her senior.<sup>66</sup> Dr. H. H. A Beach was a

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<sup>60</sup> Schultz, 48-49.

<sup>61</sup> Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 40.

<sup>62</sup> Bowers and Tick, eds., *Women Making Music*, 9.

<sup>63</sup> Macdonald, 25.

<sup>64</sup> Elizabeth Wood, “Women in Music,” *Signs* 6, no. 2 (Winter, 1980): 292.

<sup>65</sup> Bowers and Tick, eds., *Women Making Music*, 9.

<sup>66</sup> Tuthill, 299.

distinguished surgeon, a faculty member of the Harvard Medical School, and a prominent social figure.<sup>67</sup> Naturally, Clara Cheney encouraged the union. He was also an accomplished amateur singer and pianist, and had even considered a career as a musician in his youth.<sup>68</sup> Marriage marked a distinct change in the trajectory of Amy's career. As a society matron, Amy had to agree to the abandonment of her newly established concert career. She was allowed annual charity performances, but she was never to take any payments and was not allowed to give piano instruction. Instead, Dr. Beach encouraged her to compose.<sup>69</sup> Thus, Amy Marcy Cheney became Mrs. H. H. A. Beach and subsequently published and performed under this name until her husband's death in 1910. Sometime after her husband's death she commented on the early arrangement, saying, "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."<sup>70</sup>

Beach scholars debate whether or not Amy was honest in her assessment of her marriage's influence on her career. Schultz points out that though Beach claimed to be content in her new life and "very interested in housekeeping," after her husband's death she devoted the remainder of her life to performing and composing.<sup>71</sup> She also referred to married life as being "arduous."<sup>72</sup> The most convincing argument is in "A 'Veritable Autobiography'? Amy Beach's Piano

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<sup>67</sup> Gates, 2.

<sup>68</sup> Schultz, 14.

<sup>69</sup> Block, "A 'Veritable Autobiography'?" 400.

<sup>70</sup> Amy Beach, as quoted in Gates, 3.

<sup>71</sup> Schultz, 15.

<sup>72</sup> Merrill, 86.

Concerto in C-Sharp Minor, Op. 45.” In it Block analyzes Beach’s 1899 composition, claiming it as a narrative of Amy’s “long history of familial constraints frustrating her ambitions as a concert pianist.”<sup>73</sup> Though the concerto was written almost fifteen years later, its themes are quoted from three songs that were written shortly after her marriage and the termination of her performance career. The first song is the most notable and intriguing. It was set to the Chateaubriand poem “Jeune fille et jeune fleur,” and its content is highly melodramatic, the first stanza stating:

The coffin sinks—The spotless roses’ pride  
Which on its lid a weeping father laid  
Earth, thou didst bear them, and thou now dost hide  
The flower and the maid.<sup>74</sup>

Block speculates that this poem is highly charged with symbolism. Amy’s new husband represents the father in the poem (he was a year older than Amy’s own father), and the child is Amy. Even the absence of a grieving mother is contrived as symbolic, as Clara Cheney is considered implicit in her daughter’s ‘oppression’ because of how she held back her musical career. Block writes that just as the father in this poem buries his child, Amy’s husband “‘buried’ her ambitions as a pianist even as he obliterated her name and replaced it with his.”<sup>75</sup> Along with her choice of songs, the contention between the soloist and the orchestra in the concerto is very

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<sup>73</sup> Block, “A ‘Veritable Autobiography?’” 396.

<sup>74</sup> Translation from *The London Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres, Arts, Sciences, Etc* (London: H. Colburn, 1832), 411, <http://books.google.com/books?id=g79LAAAAYAAJ&lpg=PA411&ots=n95FPBPL-h&dq=English%20translation%20of%20Jeune%20fille%20et%20Jeune%20fleur&pg=PA829#v=onepage&q=English%20translation%20of%20Jeune%20fille%20et%20Jeune%20fleur&f=false> (accessed February 2, 2012).

<sup>75</sup> Block, “A ‘Veritable Autobiography?’” 401.

marked. Block points out that this represents Amy's struggle for independence from the "opposing forces in her home."<sup>76</sup>

Though this theory is thought provoking, it seems that Amy's marriage was less of a hindrance and more of a bolster to her future career. Beach herself explained that her husband was supportive, not oppressive, and "felt that her future lay in composition."<sup>77</sup> She also greatly valued his musical criticism. Dr. Beach not only enthusiastically encouraged his wife to compose, but was also instrumental in guaranteeing that she had opportunities to perform them. He used his social and musical connections to introduce her to other musicians and procure the attention that her compositions deserved.<sup>78</sup> During the twenty-five years of marriage, Beach composed and performed most of her greatest works, debuting them in a sympathetic city with a husband who attempted to protect her from prejudices of the world. Most importantly however, the marriage offered Amy financial security and independence, an invaluable asset for any composer.

There is another blow to Block's feminist view of history. For though it is presumed that Amy's creativity was oppressed by her marriage, the truth is that she composed and performed her most gender defying, large-scale works during her marriage. In 1886, a year after becoming Mrs. H. H. A. Beach, Amy began to work on her first large-scale orchestral piece, the Mass in E-flat, Op. 5.<sup>79</sup> Its performing forces were written for soloists, chorus, organ and orchestra and it was completed

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 404.

<sup>77</sup> Amy Beach, as quoted in Gates, 3.

<sup>78</sup> Schultz, 16.

<sup>79</sup> Gates, 3.

three years later in 1889. Three years after that, it was debuted by the Handel and Haydn Society of Boston and it received earnest praise. Notably, the Mass in E-flat was the first composition by a woman that the society had ever performed.<sup>80</sup> Due to the success of her first endeavor, Amy received commissions for other pieces (Festival Jubilate, Op. 17 and Scene and Aria with orchestra, Op. 18), and her career as a composer was secured.<sup>81</sup> In 1894 she began composing the folk-tune-laden *Gaelic Symphony*, Op. 32, which is often considered her finest and most daring work. After its premier with the Boston Symphony Orchestra in October 1896, it was performed extensively in the United States and in Germany as well. A writer for the *New York Times* praised the symphony, writing that she had “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.”<sup>82</sup> The Sonata in A minor for Violin and Piano was composed that same year and premiered in 1897 by Amy on piano and violinist Franz Kneisel. Finally, the Piano Concerto in C-sharp minor, Op. 45 was debuted by Amy and the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1900. Ironically, Wilhelm Gericke, who had advised the Cheneys’ not to give Amy formal theoretical and compositional training, conducted the concerto.<sup>83</sup>

Though the reception of Amy’s large-scale works from the general public was always accepting and often rapturous, the critical reception was often mixed due to

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

her gender.<sup>84</sup> The more prejudiced reviews displayed either an attempt to reconcile the mastery of the piece with the sex of its creator, or a disapproving hash at the attempted ‘virile’ sound and the loss of appropriate femininity. For instance, one reviewer of the Mass in E-flat remarked that it was “overly boisterous,” and “seeking after virility.” The reviewer then patronizingly wrote that women composers should only write “delicate, melodious songs,” because that is what they understood best.<sup>85</sup> Praise was often given with a degree of condescension as well. A reviewer from *The Etude* wrote this about the Sonata in A minor: “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.”<sup>86</sup> Clara Schumann also experienced this in the reviews of her Piano Concerto in A minor, as one critic wrote, “If the name of the female composer were not on the title, one would never think that it was written by a woman.”<sup>87</sup> This initial patronization of Amy’s works was due to the existence of a dichotomy between the dilettante and the serious composer. Female composers were almost always grouped into the former.<sup>88</sup>

Clara’s marriage to Robert Schumann in 1840 was not given the blessing and encouragement of Friedrich Wieck. In fact, when the courtship was first made known to Wieck, he threatened to shoot Schumann if Clara were ever to see him again.<sup>89</sup> The couple was forced to appeal to the courts for Clara’s emancipation from her father, because regardless of age the Saxon law required the consent of both parents for a

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<sup>84</sup> Gates, 4.

<sup>85</sup> Robert Hughes in *Contemporary American Composers* as quoted in *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>87</sup> Macdonald, 25.

<sup>88</sup> Merrill, 87.

<sup>89</sup> Reich, 71.

child to marry.<sup>90</sup> Also, from the very beginning of her performing career, Wieck had paid Clara for her work, setting aside the funds for later and keeping records of the payments in her diary. He refused to pay her this money after she married Schumann. Reich and Burton make note that Clara was forced to sue her father for the money that she had earned. Wieck felt he could keep the money, because in 1830 Germany, women had little to no right over their own money.<sup>91</sup> They also speculate that Wieck's resistance was most likely due to the fact that to lose Clara would be to lose his career. "Her concerts were his concerts, her reviews, his reviews. He shared in the tensions, the mishaps, the successes, the applause."<sup>92</sup>

The emancipation from her father did not necessarily bring independence. Schumann expressed that he didn't want her to work for the first year of their marriage and was somewhat ambivalent toward her career.<sup>93</sup> In a letter to Robert before their marriage, Clara entreated, "Must I bury my art now?"<sup>94</sup> Schumann was conflicted on the issue, and hoped for what could not be, as he wrote, "In the house such a housewife, in my heart a beloved and loving wife, for the world an artist such as it does not get every day and whom it will know how to esteem."<sup>95</sup> Though Clara still concertized, it was more out of a need for income than for its own sake, as Clara could make more in one tour than Robert could with his compositions in a whole

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<sup>90</sup> Reich and Burton, 347.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 350-352.

<sup>94</sup> Clara Wieck Schumann, as quoted in Barbara Kreader, "Clara Schumann: Ambivalence and Resilience," *Clavier Companion* 2, no. 3 (May 2010): 7.

<sup>95</sup> Robert Schumann, as quoted in Bowers and Tick, eds., *Women Making Music*, 260.

year.<sup>96</sup> Her artistry was placed behind Robert's, a sacrifice that she was apparently willing to make.<sup>97</sup> Marriage did not offer Clara the ability to grow as a composer either. She had composed throughout her childhood, at her father's urging, and had even achieved a degree of success.<sup>98</sup> Most notably her Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 7, which she composed and debuted when she was fifteen.<sup>99</sup> However after her marriage to Schumann, Clara preferred to play his pieces rather than her own.<sup>100</sup>

Robert explained the situation in letter in 1843,

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 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.<sup>101</sup>

During the fourteen years of their marriage a balance was struck. Clara set up her household to accommodate her composer-husband, her performing career, and the needs of the children. She kept a rigorous schedule. She practiced and performed, ran the household's affairs, raised eight children, and supported Robert's musical career.<sup>102</sup> As musicians they complemented each other. Clara would give Robert the inspiration for his compositions and she in turn would interpret his meaning through performing them.

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<sup>96</sup> Reich, 113.

<sup>97</sup> Robert Schumann, as quoted in Bowers and Tick, eds., *Women Making Music*, 261.

<sup>98</sup> Reich, "Clara Schumann," in *Women Making Music*, eds. Bowers and Tick, 267.

<sup>99</sup> Claudia Macdonald, "The Early Reception of Piano Concertos by Clara Wieck Schumann and Amy Beach: Critical Perception and the Woman Composer," *Current Musicology* no. 55 (Fall 1993): 25.

<sup>100</sup> Reich, "Clara Schumann," in *Women Making Music*, eds. Bowers and Tick, 266.

<sup>101</sup> Robert Schumann, as quoted in Chissell, 81.

<sup>102</sup> Reich, "Clara Schumann," in *Women Making Music*, eds. Bowers and Tick, 263.

Just like their childhood, Amy and Clara share similarities in the event and outcome of their marriages. In a sense, both were emancipated from their parents control. Amy's marriage to Dr. Beach deposed her mother as the arbiter of her career.<sup>103</sup> Clara's marriage to Robert freed her from the totalitarian control of her father. Drawing conclusions from this study, both women felt that their careers were compromised, or 'buried,' due to the nature of matrimony in a patriarchal society. Yet both were married to musicians that were understanding and sympathetic to their craft. Ultimately, the freedom allotted to Amy due to her barren marriage and financial security allowed her the time and means to hone her craft, while Clara's marriage was filled with the responsibilities of providing an income, supporting Schumann's career, and raising eight children. Also, as Schumann's mental illness worsened Clara was forced to become the stronger partner emotionally. According to Elizabeth Wood in her essay, "Women in Music," traditionally the only way 'exceptional' women composers broke out of the amateur mold was due to an advantage of birth in a musical family *and* the good fortune of financial security.<sup>104</sup> Both of these things Amy Beach possessed, while Clara lacked the latter.

Another important distinction between Amy and Clara would be their own self-perception of their roles as musicians. According to Claudia Macdonald in her article, "Critical Perception and the Woman Composer: The Early Reception of Piano Concertos by Clara Wieck Schumann and Amy Beach," Clara regarded herself mainly as a performer, while Amy assumed the more dual role as a performer-

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<sup>103</sup> Block, "A 'Veritable Autobiography?'" 406.

<sup>104</sup> Wood, 293.

composer.<sup>105</sup> The latter often commented on the positive aspects of this personal dichotomy, saying, “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! ... One great advantage is that one never grows stale, but there is always a continual interest and freshness from the change back and forth.”<sup>106</sup> She never considered that she would have to choose between one and the other, or that “creation was higher than interpretation.”<sup>107</sup> Amy truly did not believe that her sex was a hindrance or handicap. She encouraged other young women to “pitch in and try it,” and even said that the “field for composition in America offers the same prospects to young women as to young men composers.”<sup>108</sup> Clara also felt positively about composing and performing, stating that, “there is no greater joy than composing something oneself and then listening to it.”<sup>109</sup> Unfortunately, Clara was often ambivalent about her abilities. A year before her marriage to Schumann, she wrote, “I once believed that I possessed creative talent, but I have given up this idea; a woman must not desire to compose—there has never yet been one able to do it.”<sup>110</sup> This self-depreciating attitude was only consistently applied to her compositional work, and it was often paired with derision on the abilities of her own sex.<sup>111</sup> The difference in attitude and confidence is striking, especially in light of the fact that it was Clara, not Amy, who had received every benefit of compositional instruction.

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<sup>105</sup> Macdonald, 24.

<sup>106</sup> Amy Beach, as quoted in Lindsey E. Merrill, 88.

<sup>107</sup> Block, “A ‘Veritable Autobiography?’” 399-400.

<sup>108</sup> Amy Beach, as quoted in Gates, 7.

<sup>109</sup> Reich, “Clara Schumann,” in *Women Making Music*, eds. Bowers and Tick, 268.

<sup>110</sup> Clara Schumann, as quoted in *Ibid.*, 267.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 267-268.

Fundamentally, Clara and Amy were disparate in how they viewed gender in regard to the ability to successfully create music. Also, while Amy preferred creation, Clara preferred interpretation.

This is not to say that Clara Schumann “fell into line” or behaved demurely according to the social expectations of her sex. After the break from her father, Clara was the one who organized her own tours, acting as her own manager. She shaped the look and feel of the solo concert, being the one of the first to play without supporting artists and from memory. The repertoire that she chose reflected the contemporary composers whom she admired most, such as Mendelssohn, Brahms, and Schumann.<sup>112</sup> Clara also served as the principal piano teacher at the Hoch Conservatory—a notable position for a woman—for almost twenty years.<sup>113</sup> After Schumann’s death in 1856, Clara toured extensively, performing at the Gewandhaus seventy-eight times, more than any other performer.<sup>114</sup> Though she was not to be a composer of great works, she acted as interpreter for them, especially for the composer she loved most, Robert Schumann. She once wrote Brahms about her concertizing, “You regard it only as a way to earn money. I do not. I feel a calling to reproduce great works, above all, those of Robert, as long as I have the strength to do so.”<sup>115</sup>

Once more, Amy’s and Clara’s lives run parallel, as both women experienced the tragedy of a husband’s early death. According to Wood, “the end of a marriage by

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<sup>112</sup> Reich, “Clara Schumann,” in *Women Making Music*, eds. Bowers and Tick, 271.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

<sup>114</sup> Kreader, 7.

<sup>115</sup> Clara Schumann, as quoted in Kreader, 7.

death or divorce can, conversely, mark a significant career change.”<sup>116</sup> This appears to be true in the life of Amy. In 1911, a year after the death of her husband (as well as the death of her mother) Amy was finally able to travel to Europe to concertize and promote her compositions, a culminating experience for a composer-performer. She changed her name from Mrs. H. H. A. Beach to simply Amy Beach, and toured Europe for four years, performing her Piano Concerto, Piano Quintet, and Violin Sonata.<sup>117</sup> Her *Gaelic* Symphony and Concerto were played by orchestras in Leipzig and Hamburg and were received warmly by the European community.<sup>118</sup> When Amy returned to the United States in 1914, she began a concert career that continued until she began to experience ill health in 1930.<sup>119</sup> She also continued to compose, spending the summers at MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire, or at her cottage on Cape Cod.<sup>120</sup> By this time in her compositional career, she had established herself successfully as a composer. Her presence in the musical sphere had been accepted and her works were reviewed on merit rather than sex.<sup>121</sup> She kept her promise to her husband and never taught music, but she helped further the cause of woman composers by founding the Society of American Woman Composers and regularly contributing to the women’s page of *The Etude*.<sup>122</sup> Amy Beach Clubs were founded for young musicians and composers around the country in response to her

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<sup>116</sup> Wood, 294.

<sup>117</sup> Block, Amy Beach, *Passionate Victorian*, x.

<sup>118</sup> Merrill, 87.

<sup>119</sup> Gates, 7.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>121</sup> Merrill, 87.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

inspiration and influence.<sup>123</sup> She was awarded numerous honors during her career, including an honorary Master's degree from the University of New Hampshire.<sup>124</sup> By the time of her death in 1944, only two of her three hundred compositions were unpublished.<sup>125</sup> This was a remarkable feat for any composer, much less a woman.

Amy Beach left a legacy that is an inspiration for female composers today. When it was common belief that “woman should not compose” because there “has never yet been one able to do it,” she succeeded in overcoming the prejudices of her era. Her large-scale compositions shattered the dilettante stereotype, being widely performed and published, and were lauded at home and abroad. She accomplished this tremendous achievement not by overthrowing her patriarchal social system, but by working within its sphere and using its advantages to further her career. Tuthill's biography states that this was because she “lived a sort of charmed existence that has not required her to mingle too roughly with the crowd or fight strenuously to achieve her ends,” but I disagree.<sup>126</sup> She may have had the advantages of financial security and childless freedom, but it was her tenacity of spirit and humble belief that anyone could create that drove her to educate herself and to succeed. She is, in essence, supremely American. Finally, her works are important, and should not only be considered valuable because her status as America's first woman composer.<sup>127</sup> In a German review of her Piano Concerto from 1913, a critic gives ample reason as to why this should be:

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<sup>123</sup> Schultz, 20.

<sup>124</sup> Gates, 7.

<sup>125</sup> Gates, 7.

<sup>126</sup> Tuthill, 306.

<sup>127</sup> Merrill, 91.

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 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.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Gates, 6.

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