

Amy Beach

(1867-1944)

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2	Empress of Night, Op. 2 No. 3 (1891)	1:46
3	The Summer Wind, Op. 14 No. 1 (1891)	1:35
4	Sweetheart, Sigh No More, Op. 14 No. 3 (1891, rvsd. 1902)	2:55
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Patrick Mason, baritone
Joanne Polk, piano

Amy Marcy Cheney Beach

Notes by Patrick Mason

It is an important truth in considering the life and work of Amy Beach that she was the first woman composer (in America, surely, but also in the wider Western musical world) to gain attention for writing successfully in so many of the large forms of the late nineteenth century: symphony, concerto, oratorio and chamber music. Such works brought her notice and validation from the public and acceptance by many of her male counterparts. But it is by way of her songs and solo piano pieces that we glimpse a more private and intimate Beach. Audience affection for smaller, more personal compositions is not unusual; Robert Schumann comes to mind. Like him, Beach was able to personalize, transform and occasionally, of necessity, transcend poetry, eliciting a direct emotional response that moves the listener from admiration and respect to identification and connection with her on the level of a shared experience.

We know of her first as a young prodigy, a pianist of extraordinary ability and the composer of acclaimed works such as the *Mass in E-flat, Op. 5* (1892), scored for full orchestra, soloists and chorus. At the age of 18 she married Dr. Henry Harris Aubrey Beach, a man twenty-five years her senior. Acceding to her husband's request that she curtail her career



Amy Beach and Dr. H. H. A. Beach

as a pianist, she concentrated on composition, publishing her work under the name Mrs. H. H. A. Beach. After Dr. Beach's death in 1910 she returned in earnest to the concert stage, finding a receptive audience in Europe where her four-movement *Piano Concerto in C-sharp Minor* (1900) and *Gaelic Symphony* (1897) were often performed, as well as songs and the *Violin Sonata* (1899), all with great success. Significantly, she was known there as Amy Beach. She returned to America in 1914. For the next four years she performed tirelessly in concerts throughout the country, garnering particular praise for the *Piano Quintet* (1909). She collaborated with singers, including the soprano Marcella Craft, in highly successful performances of her many songs. In fact, it was the publication and performance of her songs that gained her the popularity she enjoyed.

After her death, and until very recently, the accepted picture of Amy Beach was that of a great talent somewhat stifled, somewhat out of touch. Performances of her works, once common in recitals and concerts, are rare. Of her more than one hundred and twenty songs, only a few are known to the public. Yet Beach's musical language, though Romantic, is not outdated. In her songs, as in all her work, we are witness to a brave, largely self-taught artist with a singular voice and ability to show how a composer with a thorough grasp of her craft can sing with a passion and emotional transparency many of her more famous male colleagues never achieved. Such are the lessons, if not the rewards, of history. She appears to us in her songs, capable and inspired, keenly aware of the beauty of the world around her as well as its challenges and griefs, making her way with grace and strength.

"Remember that technique is valuable only as a means to an end. You must first have something to say – something which demands expression from the depths of your soul. If you feel deeply and know how to express what you feel, you make others feel."

-Amy Beach

1 - Twilight

H. H. A. B. (1843-1910)

Op. 2, No. 1; Boston: Arthur P. Schmidt, 1887

No sun to warm
The darkning cloud of mist;
But ev'rywhere
The steamy earth sends up
A veil of grey and damp,
To kiss the green and tender leaves,
And leave its cool imprint
In limpid pearls of dew.
The blackened trunks and boughs
In ghostly silhouette,
Mark grimly in the coming eve
The shadows of the past.
All sounds are stilled;
The birds have hushed themselves to rest,
And night comes fast to drop her pall,
Till morn brings life to all.



Already in this early song we are introduced to one of the themes that unifies Beach's song writing: the presence of Nature as protagonist. Not only did she choose poetry which describes a specific time of day, temperature, quality of light, even humidity, but she formed these attributes into music using static rhythms, melodies that reluctantly rise and fall, harmonies of vague direction and, most tellingly, a piano part that speaks in the voice of this natural world. Neither hopeful nor despairing, the effect is one of anticipation. Morning comes, the sun rises and the singer is moved to grandeur of expression then hushed by that same beauty into a feeling of awe.

The score indicates the poet as H. H. A. B.. It is perhaps significant that for this first setting of her husband's work, Amy chose not an amorous text but a philosophical one. The couple had no children and there are no sure indications of the nature of their sexual relationship. However, all evidence points to a strong and passionate commitment felt by both, a feeling often evident in the songs.

2 - Empress of Night

H. H. A. B.

Op. 2, No. 3; Boston: Schmidt, 1891

Out of the darkness,
Radiant with light,
Shineth her brightness,
Empress of Night.

As granules of gold,
From her lofty height,
Or cataract bold
(Amazing sight!)

Falleth her jewels
On ev'ry side,
Lighting the joybells
Of Christmastide.

Piercing the tree-boughs
That wave in the breeze,
Painting their shadows
Among dead leaves;

Kissing the seafoam
That flies in the air,
When tossed from its home
In waves so fair;

Silv'ring all clouds
That darken her way,
As she lifts the shrouds
Of breaking day.

Amy used the material of this song and the previous one, *Twilight*, in her *Piano Concerto* of 1898-99. In, the case of the present song it is evident why she was drawn to do so. The piano provides the dominant voice, its virtuoso figurations ecstatically describing the images in this somewhat failed poem. The composer sets the difficult "joybells of Christmastide" with such enthusiasm and abandon that she carries us along with her. The harmonic shift at "painting their shadows" and the way the piano echoes the voice at "when tossed from their homes" are both pianistic and structurally sound within the form of the song. There is a confidence of expression that no doubt comes from her success as a pianist. On March 30, 1885 the *Boston Daily Advertiser* wrote, "... her technique has acquired that inexplicable something which distinguishes the artist from the accomplished amateur..." This early song displays the same distinction.

3 - The Summer Wind

Walter Learned (1847-1915)

Op. 14, No. 1; Boston; Schmidt, 1891

Softly the summer wind woos the rose;
Like a fickle lover
He kisses her petals, then off he goes
The fair fields over.

Yet since he has kissed her, forever the rose
Her heart uncloses;
And he breathes thereafter, wherever he goes,
The perfume of roses.

Voice and piano are in perfect balance in this song. The gentle, constantly moving wind is heard in the keyboard, not only in the rhythmic, repeated triplets but also in the melodic turns over the final note of each vocal phrase. The effect is that of a caress and response. The voice sings in slower, sustained notes as the rose unfolds to the kisses of the summer wind and both are transformed by the encounter. This song is an example of the sensuality central to Amy Beach's music, especially her songs. The eroticizing of Nature in poetry encourages unashamed expression of sexual feelings not otherwise appropriate at the time (for a woman, at any rate). Amy seems liberated by these texts to reveal her true self.

4 - Sweetheart, Sigh No More

Thomas Bailey Aldrich (1836-1906)

Op. 14, No. 3; Boston; Schmidt, 1891;
revised version: Boston; Schmidt 1902

It was with doubt and trembling
I whispered in her ear,
Go, take her answer, bird-on-bough,
That all the world may hear --
"Sweetheart, sigh no more!"

Sing it, sing it, tawny throat,
Upon the wayside tree,
How fair she is, how true she is,
How dear she is to me --
"Sweetheart, sigh no more."

And through the summer long
The winds among the clovertops,
And brooks, for all their silv'ry stops,
Shall envy you the song --
Sweetheart, sigh no more!

A lover repeats the long-hoped-for words of the woman he has pursued. The tenderness with which he echoes her assent and acquiescence are treated with great care. The piano, playing the part of the bird-on-bough, repeats the first-verse vocal melody dutifully. The interludes between verses are particularly expressive. At the end of the song, the music raises the essentially child-like innocence of the poem to a more adult level, as the composer unleashes her command of the piano. The first two verses, sincere to be sure, do not foreshadow what Beach has in store for us. Something about "the wind among the clovertops" turns the song from a polite sentiment of gratitude into a rush of sustained, fervent emotion. The piano, no longer content with halting syncopations and sweet chromaticism, gushes forward in triplets that eventually sweep away the voice. One wonders if Beach is expressing not so much the poet/suitor as the deeper feelings of the woman whose affections he has obtained. The prolonged, sustained climax seems more womanly and less immediately expended than similar passages by, say, Richard Strauss, whose ability to portray the passion of women was thought particularly imaginative.

5 - Golden Gates

No poet named

Op. 19, No. 3; Boston; Schmidt, 1893

I stood at the window one evening
As the sun was sinking low,
And the shadows a mantle were weaving
To cover the earth below

And the crimson gates of the west
Were flooded with amber and gold,
A gleam of the home of the blest,
Whose glories to us are untold.

And I wondered if the bright angels--
When they bore our loved ones away
To the beautiful home o'er the river,
Where life is an endless day,

Passed through those clouds bright and golden
As they went to the land of the blest --
If Heaven lies just over yonder,
Near the golden gates of the west.



Here, a song of simplicity and directness recalls tunes heard in Protestant churches at the time, sung by casually trained voices and unmarred by high, operatic intent. A childlike musing on the vastness of the scene before her and the immeasurableness of time and eternity is created not by elaborate musical devices but by a clear setting of the text. This ability to identify with the poet's point of view and express it so directly is a trait that she uses to great effect in many songs.

6 - Villanelle

Edith M. Thomas (1854-1925)

Op. 20; Boston; Schmidt, 1895

Across the world I speak to thee;
Where'er thou art (I know not where),
Send thou a messenger to me!

I here remain, who would be free,
To seek thee out through foul or fair;
Across the world I speak to thee.

Whether beneath the tropic tree,
The cooling night wind fans thy hair,
Send thou a messenger to me!

Whether upon the rushing sea,
A foamy track thy keel doth wear,
Across the world I speak to thee.

Whether in yonder star thou be,
A spirit loosed in purple air,
Send thou a messenger to me.

Hath Heaven not left thee memory
Of what was well in mortal's share?
Across the world I speak to thee;
Send thou a messenger to me!

The villanelle has its roots in Italian songs and dances with their use of refrains. The form was taken up by the French, notably Jean Passerat (1535-1602), and became a more codified poetic structure. An initial stanza of three lines is devised, the first and last of which must rhyme. Each of the five following stanzas ends with one of those lines repeated verbatim. Dylan Thomas's *Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night*, is the most famous modern example of the form. The villanelle's required repetition rings changes on meanings which are too deep to be sounded once only, giving composers a unified structure which nonetheless permits significant freedom of invention.

Edith Thomas's poem of desperate yearning describes a distant beloved whose fate is unknown. Beach sets the words with requisite intensity, varying the mood though not the underlying rhythm that drives the piece to its wearied, nearly hopeless conclusion. This important song shows Amy's fearlessness in writing big, dramatic melodies with wide leaps, an extended range and marked dynamic contrasts. She reworks the melodic shape of the repeated lines with subtlety, keeping the strength of the overall structure but finding within it permutations of the bitterness and even terror which attend personal loss.

7 - Wouldn't That Be Queer

Elsie J. Cooley (1864-?)

Op. 26, No. 4; Boston; Schmidt, 1894

If the trees knew how to run up and down the hill,
If the cats and dogs could talk and we had to keep still,
If the flowers all should try, like birds, to sing and fly,
And the birds were always found growing up out of the ground,
Dear, dear, Wouldn't that be queer?

If the babies when they came were very old and tall,
And grew down instead of up to be quite young and small,
If the sun should come out bright in the middle of the night,
And the dark should come and stay when we know that it was day,
Dear, dear, Wouldn't that be queer?



A childish nonsense poem draws from Beach a setting that would sound utterly Viennese if tricked out with German text. The melody is so affable, so *schwungvoll*, that one can easily imagine her playing it as a solo piano piece, freely embellishing in order to display her considerable keyboard technique. It is a refreshing sorbet after the previous song.

8 - Within My Heart

Mrs. H. H. A. Beach (1867-1944)

Op. 29, No. 1; Boston; Schmidt, 1895

My love to thee I give,
For thou my love hast won,
Deep in my heart to live,
Thy glance a sunbeam shone.

My life to thee I give,
For thou are life to me,
Within thy heart to live
Forever, heav'n would be!

Amy Beach was in the habit of dedicating a song to her husband, Henry, for his birthday (December 18), which he would sing as she accompanied him. While we have no evidence that this particular poem was written for such an occasion, it is easy to conjure such a scene for the piece. For all its obvious intimacy, this simple strophic song has a vocal range wider than that of the more dramatic *Villanelle*. Its ardor appears to be both honest and virtuous. It is a sentimental song but the emotion rings true.

9 - Anita

Cora Randall Fabbri (1871-1892)

Op. 41, No. 1; Boston; Schmidt, 1898

A broad green sea the vineyard lay;
He saw her pass along that way,--
The fair Anita,

A little kerchief on her head;
A little mouth, so small, so red,
Had gay Anita.

Plaiting the straw and singing sweet,
He saw her with her bare brown feet--
The fair Anita.

"Oh, little joy of Spring," he said,
And kissed the mouth so small, so red
Of gay Anita.

But when the ripened grapes had come
To stain the vines like purple foam,
(Ah, poor Anita!)

He was not there; she did not sing;
And all the joy had fled from Spring
For fair Anita.

Plaiting the straw with sweet lips dumb,
She waits, and yet, he does not come,
Alas, Anita.

Beach, like Schubert before her, was not always drawn to fine poetry for her songs. (Choosing minor poetry is not necessarily bad practice for a composer. A fine poem has no need of setting, a poor poem may find artistic life only at the hands of a composer willing to set it.) In the case of Cora Fabbri, an Italian-American of great promise who died in San Remo at the age of twenty-one, Amy discovered a poet with excellent abilities and the kind of honest expression that appealed to her. She responded with a melody of French clarity, recalling the best songs of Gounod or Reynaldo Hahn (cf. the latter's *Trois Jours de Vendange*). What could have been an indulgent, even maudlin, song is given charm and believability by a light piano part full of quick ornamental gestures and a tasteful vocal line. The restraint brings to life the poignant, sad story of innocence corrupted. That the young Cora could write such convincing verse and that Amy could set it so effectively from the comfortable vantage of a happily married life evidences the depth of creativity possessed by both women.

10 - The Year's at the Spring

Robert Browning (1812 - 1889)

Op. 44, No. 1; Boston; Schmidt, 1900

The year's at the spring.
And day's at the morn;
Morning's at seven;
The hillside's dew-pearled;
The lark's on the wing;
The snail's on the thorn;

God's in his heaven --
All's right with the world!



The three Browning settings, Op. 44, are considered Beach's strongest. The first of these is clearly her most popular song, though more for its aptness as a recital closer than for its musical value, great as that may be. Taken from the larger poem, *Pippa Passes*, it is a single exhalation of joy sung by poor, young Pippa as she revels in the freedom of her single day off in the year. Her unsophisticated song convicts her callous hearers of their lack of authenticity and capacity for such happiness. We give ourselves over to a faith that puts us in harmony with this lovely world. It is an irresistible song, especially in live performance where the audience can see the athleticism of the artists and respond with appropriate enthusiasm.

11 - Ah, Love, but a day!

Robert Browning

Op. 44, No. 2; Boston; Schmidt, 1900

Ah, Love, but a day,
And the world has changed!
The sun's away,
And the bird estranged;
The wind had dropped,
And the sky's deranged:
Summer has stopped.

Look in my eyes!
Wilt thou change too?
Should I fear surprise?
Shall I find aught new
In the old and dear,
In the good and true?
With the changing year?

The composer takes considerable liberties with this justly famous lyric, leaving off the third, more revealing, stanza and repeating phrases out of order. These are the first lines of Browning's poem, *James Lee's Wife*, the initial work in the collection *Dramatis Personae* of 1864. As in *Villanelle*, Beach has chosen themes of uncertainty and loss, themes the complete poem develops at length. Again she creates an atmosphere of desperation in spite of the turn to a major key in the second stanza. A finer marriage of voice, piano and text can hardly be imagined. The musical emphasis on the phrase "Summer has stopped" gives the song a depth of characterization which the poem needs many additional words to provide. The panic-stricken acceleration of rhythm in the middle of each verse puts tremendous emotional weight at the end of each stanza, where the words are sustained to the utmost as the piano holds back its forward motion, hoping to hear an answer that will not come. The gentle mood of the final measures illustrates the compassion of the composer and, it is hoped, the listener for the suffering of one from whom love is withheld.

12 - Come, ah come!

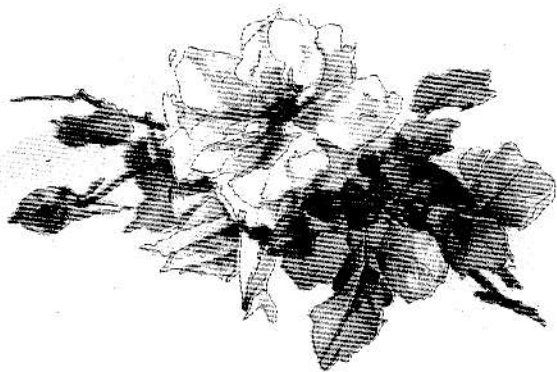
H. H. A. B.

Op. 48, No. 1; Boston; Schmidt, 1902

When the summertime has flown,
Bright with happy dreams,
And the fading leaves alone
Are left of all its gleams,
Come, ah come, my own true love.

Come, ah come, my own true love,
To me thy promise keep,
And bring the bliss of heav'n above,
When I alone shall weep!

This song seems to reflect the warmth of the relationship between Amy and Henry, a portrait of sorts. It recalls the time when he was courting this talented and beautiful young woman. The rich sensuousness of the harmonies, the fervent insistence of the word "Come," the feeling at the end that the lover's wishes will be satisfied—all are delivered in a direct, heartfelt manner. Amy tells us the story from both sides, yielding magical results.



13 - Good Morning

Agnes Helen Lockheart (dates unknown, contemporary with Amy Beach)

Op. 48, No. 2; Boston; Schmidt, 1902

“Good morn” -- the lark is singing,
A soft, sweet roundelay,
And the pansies ope their pretty eyes
To whisper, love, “Good day!”
The grasses on their velvet coats
Bright jeweled dewdrops wear--
While the lily rises, tall and pale,
Like a nun from silent prayer!

The purple veins are thrilling
In the violet's perfumed breast,
And the crimson roses blush as though
They, too, my secret guessed!
“Good morn!” The flowers whisper, dear,
As the lark soars up above:
And ah! My heart is singing too--
“Good morn! Good morn! My love!

Adrienne Fried Block points out that this song was published the same year Beach published her piano transcription of Richard Strauss's song *Standchen*. It shares with that piece the 6/8 meter and the motor rhythms of the accompaniment, though hers is an “aubade,” a morning courtship song, whereas Strauss wrote a “serenade” to the evening. The carefully fashioned keyboard part provides the variation needed for this strophic song. The introduction and brief interludes are typically soloistic, but during the sung verses the inner voices in both hands make the texture richer than expected. Amy, describing her beloved flowers and birds, abandons herself to the task. The world is always profuse when she is outdoors. The piano plays an octave higher in the second stanza, higher yet in the third stanza, until, at the climax, the entire instrument is sounded. The wide range of dynamics and colors make this song a worthy companion to its German model.

14 - Go Not Too Far

Florence Earle Coates (1850-1927)

Op. 56, No. 2; Boston; Schmidt, 1904

Go not too far--too far beyond my gaze,
Thou who canst never pass beyond the yearning
Which, even as the dark for dawning stays,
Awaits thy loved returning!

Go not too far! Howe'er thy fancies roam,
Let them come back, wide-circling, like the swallow,
Lest I, for very need, should try to come--
Yet find I could not follow!



It is often said that small-scale music is particularly difficult to write because there is no room for excess or misstep. The best lieder composers make the task seem easy, with Franz Schubert as the confirmed master of the genre. Beach shows her quality here with a superbly constructed vocal line. At first the melody moves gently, tentatively, in stepwise motion and is followed by leaps which grow from fourths to sevenths and octaves, plunging and rising with unexpected intensity. The piano, discreet and modest throughout, adds its own melody at the close of each verse.

15 - Shena Van

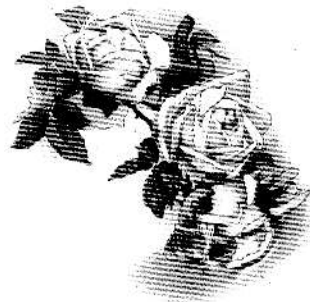
William Black (1841-1898)

Op. 56, No. 4; Boston; Schmidt, 1904

Her eyes are dark and soft and blue,
She's light-stepped as the roe;--
O Shena Van, my heart is true
To you, where'er you go!

I wish that I were by the rills
Above the Alltambân;--
And wand'ring with me o'er the hills
My own dear Shena Van!

Far other sights and scenes I view;
The year goes out in snow, O--
Shena Van, my heart is true
To you, where'er you go!



The Scotsman William Black was a writer of successful Gothic romances. This song is taken from his book "*Yolande*" of 1883. Shena Van is a term of endearment. The song's mood here is amiable, with the singer almost as much in love with his feelings as he is with his beloved. Beach uses the "Scotch snap" figure in the introduction. The melody, with its dotted rhythms and even a caroling "Ah," is folk-pastiche. She spices the dish with piquant harmonies and many modifications of tempo, allowing the singer freedom to bring out the ethnic, informal aspects of the song.

16 - Baby

George MacDonald (1824-1905)

Op. 69, No 1; Boston; Schmidt, 1908

Where did you come from, baby dear?
Out of the everywhere into here.

Where did you get those eyes so blue?
Out of the sky as I came through.

Where did you get that little tear?
I found it waiting when I got here.

What makes your cheek like a warm white rose?
I saw something better than any one knows.

Where did you get this pearly ear?
God spoke, and it came out to hear.

Where did you get those arms and hands?
Love made itself into bonds and bands.

How did they all just come to be you?
God thought about me, and so I grew.

But how did you come to us, you dear?
God thought about you, and so I am here.

Few of George MacDonald's poems and stories were known after his death until his rediscovery in the 1970s. C. S. Lewis favored MacDonald's writing, tinged as it was with Victorian religious mysticism, and Lewis's fame revived interest in MacDonald. *Baby* had always remained popular, however, because of its unabashed and overtly sentimental theme, the feelings of which are shared by all parents (if not always by their friends). Although the Beaches were childless, Amy's setting is as tender and solicitous as any mother's caress. A two-verse song with a curiously 'right-sounding' minor key opening, it conveys an improbable conversation without resorting to vulgar register changes or other such devices. One can imagine this unapologetically sweet song as a perfect vehicle for John McCormack or the matronly contralto Ernestine Schumann-Heink.

17 - O Sweet Content

Thomas Dekker (1570?-1632)

Op. 71, No. 2; Boston; Schmidt, 1910

The text below, the "Basket Maker's Song," is a dialogue between Grissell's father, Ianocolo, and the court fool, Babulo.:

Ianocolo:

Art thou poore, yet has thou golden slumbers:

O sweet content!

Art thou rich, yet is thy minde perplexed,

O punishment!

Dost thou laugh to see how fools are vexed

To add to golden numbers golden numbers:

O sweet content!

Fool:

Then work apace, apace, apace!

Honest labor bears a lovely face;

Then hey nonny, nonny.

Ianocolo:

Canst drink the waters if the Crisped spring:

O sweet content!

Swim'st thou in wealth yet sink'st in thine owne tears,

O punishment!

Then hee who patiently want's burden bears,

No burden bears, but is a King, a King,

O sweet content!

Fool:

Then work apace, apace, apace:

Honest labor bears a lovely face,

Then hey nonny, nonny.

Amy Beach chose a style imitating Elizabethan music as she would have known it. Sustained open fifths in the left hand provide a drone against which a graceful duet is played above. The vocal line is complete with madrigalesque 'hey nonny, nonnies' and a florid movement rarely found in her songs.

18 - Wind o' the Westland

Dana Burnet (1888-1962)

Op. 77, No. 2; Boston; Schmidt, 1916

Wind o' the Westland,

Blow, blow,

Bring me the dreams of long ago,

Long, long ago.

There was a white house on the hill,

Tell me, winds, does it stand there still?

For I was the lad at the windowsill,--

Long, long ago.

Wind o' the Westland,

Blow, blow,

Bring me the dreams of long ago,

Long, long ago.

There was a garden blooming fair,

And an old, old lady walking there,

And a little lad with tousled hair,

Long, long ago.

Wind o' the Westland,

Blow, blow,

Bring me the dreams of long ago,

Long, long ago.

There was a shining path that lay

Over the edge of the golden day,

And I was the lad who rode away

Long, long ago.



In 1916, while staying at the Mission Inn in California, Amy was awakened each morning by the cooing of doves near her room. She wrote, "The words of [this] poem seemed to fit against the background of sound." The mood, engendered by the brooding wind, brings forth three nostalgic glimpses of a lost life, each with its own atmosphere. The harmonies, which vary to portray pleasantness and hope, eventually devolve into the mysterious, rocking figures of the opening. The modulations at the end of the second stanza are particularly haunting, with enharmonic shifts that leave the listener unmoored until the last possible moment of resolution. We muse uneasily with the poet on the insubstantiality of memory.

19 - In the Twilight

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882)

Op. 85; Boston; Schmidt, 1922

The twilight is sad and cloudy,
The wind blows wild and free,
And like the wings of seabirds
Flash the white caps of the sea.

But in the fisherman's cottage
There shines a ruddier light,
And a little face at the window
Peers out into the night.

Close, close it is pressed to the window,
As if those childish eyes
Were looking into the darkness,
To see some form arise.

And a woman's waving shadow
Is passing to and fro,
Now rising to the ceiling,
Now bowing and bending low.

What tale do the roaring ocean,
And the night-wind, bleak and wild,
As they beat at the crazy casement,
Tell to that little child?

And why do the roaring ocean,
And the night-wind, wild and bleak
As they beat at the heart of the mother,
Drive the color from her cheek?

In the Twilight (continued)

Longfellow was a dearly loved and admired poet by the end of the nineteenth century (Amy had met him when she was young and played for him in his home). This poem describes a mother and child, awaiting the return of a father at sea in a storm. Ballads like this one (he titles it simply *Twilight*) were his stock-in-trade. While he may not be considered one of the country's greatest poets, overshadowed as he is by Whitman and others, he remains widely read and decidedly American.

In some ways, this is the most unexpected of all Amy's songs. The individual details are recognizably hers, but the halting, fragmented structure and harmonic ambiguity are astonishing.

She begins with a gust of salty air as sixteenth-notes scurry over the keyboard in close formation, huddling against the storm. Beach then varies this movement to reveal particulars of the scene and the dark forebodings of the mother, her child and the narrator. The light from the cottage window changes the key from an ambiguous F-sharp minor to major for a moment. The piano suspends its motion briefly as the child peers out, looking "to see some form arise" in the darkness.

The strange, unsettling shadow moving about the room screws the pitch higher in chromatic sequences of diminished harmonies, collapsing as the shadow is "bending low."

An ominous section, beginning low in the piano with double octaves, builds to a horrific climax as Beach describes the voice of the wind telling the worst to the terrified youngster.

The mother's feelings are more suppressed, in deference to the child perhaps, but even more chilling. Amy leaves the voice to stand alone, the wife locked inside her own fear. The ending is as startling as the ending of Schubert's *Erlkönig*, or even more so, because no conventional device of any kind marks the end of the song. Beach forces us to choose when to break our concentration and move from the storm back to the theater. It is an unnerving and unique moment in song literature.

20 - Mine Be the Lips

Leonora Speyer (1872-1956)

Op. 113; Boston: Ditson; 1926

If I could sing the song of the dawn,
The caroling word of leaf and bird
And the sun-waked fern uncurling there,
I would go lonely and would not care.

If I could sing the song of the dusk,
The stars and moon of glist'ning June,
Lit at the foot and head of me
The Spinner might break the thread of me.

If I could sing the song of Love,
Fill my throat with each sounding note,
Others might kiss and clasp and cling:
Mine be the lips that would sing, would sing.

The consolations of music and work were great for Amy after Henry's death. Her musical style was developing - in her own way of course. Although we do not hear the influence of Stravinsky or Schoenberg, we find increased chromaticism, unprepared and unresolved dissonances and tonalities which move freely and unexpectedly.

The poet, Leonora Speyer, was an American violinist trained in Europe. Only after her return to this country did she begin writing poetry, winning the Pulitzer Prize in 1927 for her book "Fiddler's Farewell."

Mine Be the Lips, taken from an earlier collection, "*A Canopic Jar*," provided Amy with a wonderful meditation on priorities. The casual rhythm and musing harmony of the opening lead to an intoned first phrase that quickly expands in range. The nonchalance of "I would go lonely and would not care" seems convincing, until an unexpected silence stops us in our tracks. The second stanza is more reckless: wide leaps and clipped rhythms tempt the Fates to cut the thread of life if it offers only the "song of the dusk." Then, in the final stanza, Beach gets to the heart of the matter: the song of love is more important than the others and the singing more dear than kissing, clasping and clinging. The ecstatic climax of the song, with cascading chromatics in the piano, boldly declares the joy of music and singing.

21 - Dark Garden

Leonora Speyer

Op. 131; Boston; Schmidt, 1932

Here where I pass
Are whispered incantations
Of shower and shower;
Green is now being granted to the grass
And fragrance to the flower.

Where wind has raged,
Not a wet leaf now stirs,
Though trees loom tall;
In this dim place is ev'ry thirst assuaged--
Mine, most of all.



Another of Speyer's poems calls from Amy a song of brooding and ultimately redemptive intensity. The song is through-composed, not strophic as hers usually were. The mood is unified by the almost continuous patter of sixteenth-notes in the piano. Deep, low octaves cover us in shadow as the song begins. Rain drips gently from the leaves above, rain which brings life and renewal. The storm is over and the voice rises in full-throated gratitude at the realization that thirst and desire are also over and the time for wholeness has come. Beach turns a good poem into an earnest revelation, expressing the concerns of life and the possibility of a gracious response.

22 - I Shall Be Brave

Katherine Adams (dates unknown, contemporary with Amy Beach)

Op. 143; Boston; Schmidt, 1932

I shall be brave as the Spring comes by,
The sweet faint time of rose-touched orchard trees,
And fragrant field flowers tossing in the breeze,
Of pearly petals and a lilac sky.

I shall be still as the Spring comes by,
The late deep Spring of daffodils that blow,
Of singing gardens where soft pansies grow,
And woody shadows where white violets lie.

And in the hush as the Spring comes by,
The frail strange time of shy young bud and leaf,
Something shall come to heal me of my grief,
Peace and the blessing of the lilac sky.

A profound song of deep and lasting resolve closes this disc. The harmonic ambiguity of the opening no longer seems startling but rather a way of gently easing into the text. Amy surrounds herself with all that she loves: Spring, wildflowers and the innocence of the season. Above is the sky in sunset colors, heard in blushing harmonies. The mood is of great, abiding content until, at the mention of frail, shy youth some inner torment arises. The keyboard plummets to its lowest pitch and screams in wrenching, dissonant chords as the singer lets loose a cry of pain. What is this anguish: Henry's death, an unspoken burden of regret or personal hurt? After an awful silence we are turned outward again. The sky, the color of lilacs, gives benediction. Evening descends with healing and peace.



Joanne Polk

Pianist **Joanne Polk** has been catapulted into the public eye with her transversal of the complete piano works of American composer Amy Beach. In March 2000, Ms Polk celebrated the centennial of Beach's *Piano Concerto in C-sharp minor* by giving the work its London premiere with the English Chamber Orchestra at the Barbican Center under the baton of Paul Goodwin. A few days later, Ms. Polk performed the *Piano Concerto* with the Women's Philharmonic in San Francisco with conductor Apo Hsu in a performance described as "brilliant" by critic Joshua Kosman of the *San Francisco Chronicle*. He went on to describe Ms. Polk's performance as, "an enormously vital, imaginative reading. Her playing was expansive in the opening movement, brittle and keen in the delightful scherzo. She brought a light touch to the foreshortened slow movement and fearless technical penache to the showy conclusion."

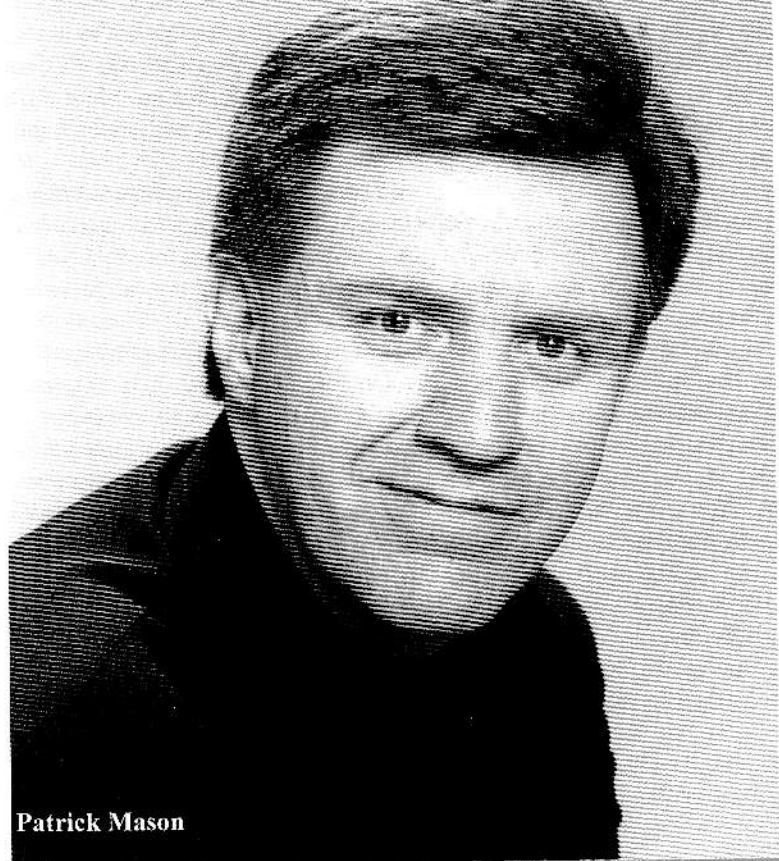
Empress of Night, released on Arabesque Recordings, continues Ms. Polk's ongoing survey of Beach's piano works, and includes the *Piano Concerto* with the English Chamber Orchestra, Paul Goodwin conducting. The first recording in the Beach series, *by the still waters*, received the 1998 INDIE award for best solo recording. *Morning Glories*, joins Ms. Polk with the Lark Quartet in three outstanding chamber music works by Amy Beach. Two all-Beach performances at Merkin Concert Hall, which featured Joanne Polk and the Lark Quartet, was applauded by the *New York Times*, as they deemed Polk's performances "polished and assured." The *American Record Guide* reported, "Polk and the Larks played their hearts out. We in the audience shouted ourselves hoarse with gratitude."

Prior to recording the complete piano music of Amy Beach, Ms. Polk recorded lieder and chamber music for Arabesque Recordings. *Completely*

Clara: Lieder by Clara Wieck Schumann, Ms. Polk's debut CD for Arabesque Recording featuring Metropolitan Opera soprano Korliss Uecker, was selected as a "Best of the Year" recording by the *Seattle Times* and was featured on *Performance Today* on New York Public Radio. Ms. Polk's most recent CD for Albany Records, *Callisto*, was released in January 2004 and features the solo piano music of Judith Lang Zaimont.

Ms. Polk has performed in solo recitals, with chamber ensembles, and as a soloist with orchestras in Europe, the United States and Australia. With composer Judith Lang Zaimont, she co-founded *American Accent*, a New York-based contemporary music group specializing in coveted, repeat performances of new works.

Ms. Polk received her Bachelor of Music and Master of Music Degrees from The Juilliard School, and her Doctor of Musical Arts Degree from Manhattan School of Music. She has recently given master classes at the Summit Music Festival and at the University of Minnesota, and joined the piano faculty of the Castelnuovo di Garfagnna Music Festival in Italy in summer of 2004. She is presently the Director of the Precollege Division at Manhattan School of Music. Ms. Polk is an exclusive Steinway artist.



Patrick Mason

The distinguished American baritone **Patrick Mason** has appeared in recital at London's Wigmore Hall, at the Cairo Opera House, and in festivals throughout Europe and the United States. He has premiered operas by composers including Tod Machover, John Duffy and Randall Shinn in Tokyo, New York, Los Angeles, Boston, Philadelphia and New Mexico, and has worked in recording and performance with composers Leonard Bernstein, Stephen Sondheim, Elliott Carter, George Crumb, John Musto, Ellen Zwillich and Barbara Kolb. Mr. Mason has sung with the Rochester Philharmonic, the Syracuse Symphony, the Colorado Springs Philharmonic, the West Virginia Symphony, the Boulder Bach Festival and Speculum Musicae. Patrick Mason has been a soloist with many of this country's early music ensembles including the Waverly Consort, the Boston Camerata and Schola Antiqua, and he has toured and recorded with guitarist David Starobin for more than thirty five years. Mr. Mason has recorded for Columbia, Vox, MHS, Nonesuch, l'Oiseaux Lyre and Erato. His solo recordings on the Bridge label of Schubert's *Winterreise* and French song cycles have received glowing reviews both in the USA and abroad. Patrick Mason is currently Associate Professor of Voice at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Having been born and raised in the low clay hills above the Ohio River, his passions are (naturally) hiking and ceramics.

Producer: David Starobin
Executive Producer: Becky Starobin
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Editor: Silas Brown
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—Patrick Mason

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And to Amy Beach. Your loveliness inspires, consistently.

—Joanne Polk

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Cover photograph of Amy Beach at sixteen, c. 1880
& Photograph of Dr. H. H. A. Beach and Amy Beach: Milne Special Collections, University of New Hampshire Library, Durham NH
Photograph of Patrick Mason: Robert Siedentop
Photograph of Joanne Polk: Jeffrey Langford

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It gives me deep and genuine joy to dedicate this recording to my mother, Alice Mason. Her kindness, patience and gentle strength of character, so like Amy's, continue to be an inspiration to me. She gave me the voice with which I sing and I will forever be grateful to her.

—Patrick Mason

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