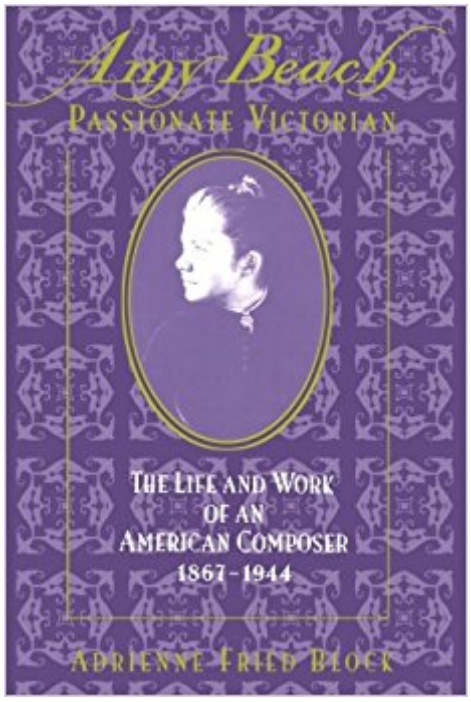
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Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian: The Life And Work Of An American Composer, 1867-1944



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Synopsis

Amy Marcy Cheney Beach (1867-1944), the most widely performed composer of her generation, was the first American woman to succeed as a creator of large-scale art music. Her "Gaelic" Symphony, given its premiere by the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1896, was the first work of its kind by an American woman to be performed by an American orchestra. Almost all of her more than 300 works were published soon after they were composed and performed, and today her music is finding new advocates and audiences for its energy, intensity, and sheer beauty. Yet, until now, no full-length critical biography of Beach's life or comprehensive critical overview of her music existed. This biography admirably fills that gap, fully examining the connections between Beach's life and work in light of social currents and dominant ideologies. Born into a musical family in Victorian times, Amy Beach started composing as a child of four and was equally gifted as a pianist. Her talent was recognized early by Boston's leading musicians, who gave her unqualified support. Although Beach believed that the life of a professional musician was the only life for her, her parents had raised her for marriage and a career of amateur music-making. Her response to this parental (and later spousal) opposition was to find creative ways of reaching her goal without direct confrontation. Discouraged from a full-scale concert career, she instead found her mÃƒÂ©tier in composition. Success as a composer of art songs came early for Beach: indeed, her songs outsold those of her contemporaries. Nevertheless, she was determined to separate her work from the genteel parlor music women were writing in her day by creating large-scale works--a Mass, a symphony, and chamber music--that challenged the accepted notion that women were incapable of creating high art. She won the respect of colleagues and the allegiance of audiences. Many who praised her work, however, considered her an exception among women. Beach's reaction to this was to join with other women composers of serious music by promoting their works along with her own. Adrienne Fried Block has written a biography that takes full account of issues of gender and musical modernism, considering Beach in the contexts of her time and of her composer contemporaries, both male and female. Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian will be of great interest to students and scholars of American music, and to music lovers in general.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"A consistently interesting biography of America's first notable female composer....Fascinating."--The New York Times Book Review"[This is a] brilliant, engaging biography....Block is the ideal voice for Amy Beach, for she writes as Beach composed: lyrically, sensitively, powerfully, passionately, and convincingly."--Joanne Polk, Professor and Director of Chamber Music and Ensembles at the Manhattan School of Music (recorded the complete solo music of Amy Beach for Arabesque Recordings)"At last! A definitive study-in-the-round of composer Amy Beach....Confirming Beach's prodigious musical gifts, this biography, an informed and revelatory feminist study...appears fortuitously at a time when Beach's music, for long a victim of the anti-Romantic bias of American musical modernism, is coming to be recognized for its integrity and expressive range." --H. Wiley Hitchcock, Distinguished Professor of Music Emeritus, City University of New York."In her thoroughly researched and eminently readable study, Ms. Block presents Beach as not merely a victim of male chauvinism but also a many-sided historical figure: a dutiful daughter and wife who happened to be aflame with musical ideas and found ways to let people know it."--David Wright, The New York Times"With meticulous documentation, musicologist Block tells Beach's story....Block carefully details Beach's musical prowess, her keen ambition, the advantages of her Boston surroundings, and a wealth of sheer luck to make a convincing case for Beach the 'pathfinder and model'"--National Women's Association Journal

Adrienne Fried Block has long been active as a speaker and writer on women and music. Women in American Music: A Bibliography of Music and Literature (1979), which she co-edited and compiled, remains a standard reference for the topic. She holds a Ph.D. in Musicology from City University of New York, in which she has taught and where she is currently Co-Director of the Project for the

Study of Women in Music.

Months after the passing of author Adrienne Fried Block and over a decade since the publication of her impressive study of Amy Beach, the work continues to stand up. The minor errors are hardly worth mentioning--e.g., a footnote here and there, or a lone opus number. Block injects her own passion for truth and detail into the dramatic arc of Beach’s life to produce not only a research tool and musical biography, but also a model of how to write about women composers, whose lives carry complexities and conflicts. That Beach--America’s first woman composer of a symphony, a concerto, a Mass, a string quartet--was captured for history by Block is justice well served.

I bought this book for a report for my Women in Music class. Rarely have I so enjoyed reading a book for a school project! Highly recommended for anyone with an interest in Victoriana, American classical music, or women composers.

At last, a full-length biography of the "Dean of American Women Composers." Engaging and thorougly researched. The only thing lacking is a discography of Beach’s music. Highly recommended.

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