

# COMPOSER SPOTLIGHT



**AMY BEACH**

1867-1944

Style: Romantic



## A Prodigy is Born

Amy Beach was born in Henniker, New Hampshire. She wasted no time in developing her musical talents. At age one, she could sing forty songs. By age two, she was improvising counter melodies and taught herself how to read at age three. At four, she wrote three waltzes for piano during a summer when she had no access to a piano! Instead, she played them in her head. She could also play four-part hymns by ear.

## Music Training and Early Career

Beach began lessons at the age of six and studied piano with Carl Baermann, a student of Franz Liszt. Music managers wanted her to go on tour, but her parents declined. She later expressed gratitude for this decision. She made her concert debut at 16 in Boston's Music Hall. She had limited training in composition but taught herself by reading books on theory, composition, and orchestration.



## Famous Firsts

Amy Beach was the first American woman to compose and publish a symphony. She did so with her "Gaelic" Symphony, premiered by the Boston Symphony in 1896. The Handel and Haydn Society Orchestra also had its first performance of a piece by a woman composer with her Mass in E-flat Major in 1892.

## Social Limitations

Similar to Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel, Amy Beach was an upper-class woman who was expected to function a certain way within her social sphere. This meant not teaching or performing regularly. In fact, she limited her performances to twice per year and donated the profits to charity. In the 20th Century, after her husband's death, she began teaching and coaching a variety of composers and music students.

## Significant Works:

- Gaelic Symphony
- Piano Concerto
- Variations on Balkan Themes