

Mrs. H. H. A. Beach
(Amy Marcy Cheney Beach)

b. Henniker, New Hampshire, 5 September 1867
 d. New York City, 27 December 1944

*Romance for Violin and Piano, Op. 23*¹



Amy Beach autographed this photograph to Powell "with the deepest admiration, Boston, Ap. 15, 1901," the day after Powell's triumphant performance of the Tchaikovsky violin concerto with the Boston Symphony Orchestra; inscribed with the opening measures of the *Romance*.
 Maud Powell Society Archive

Maud Powell's association with Amy Beach, perhaps the earliest and most prominent American woman composer, dates back to 1893. How Powell and Beach first met is not known, but they came together most notably at the Women's Musical Congress, held in Chicago on July 5–7, 1893, during the World's Columbian Exposition.

Powell was involved in formulating the Women's Musical Congress, chaired by Mrs. George B. Carpenter (Elizabeth Curtis Greene), a pianist and mezzo-soprano and the mother of composer John Alden Carpenter. Prominent women in music, including Lillian Nordica, the American opera singer; Rose Fay Thomas, wife of Theodore Thomas; violinist Camilla Urso; and Powell, presented papers to the assembly of 1,500. Powell spoke on "Women and the Violin," encouraging young girls and women to study the violin seriously despite the professional barriers facing them.

On July 6, Maud Powell joined Amy Beach in the premiere of the *Romance*, Op. 23, which Beach had composed for the occasion and dedicated to Powell.² The two must have taken special delight in this event. Born within two weeks of one another, they had both been child prodigies and had first performed with conductor Theodore Thomas in 1885. Each had already won impressive recognition in the male-dominated music profession.

Beach's works were characterized by technical mastery, spontaneity, and originality—all traits crystallized in the *Romance*. The work was described as "graceful though difficult of performance" and "worthy of the author of the *Festival jubilate*," which Beach had composed for the opening ceremony for the Woman's Building.³ Those who heard the *Romance* played that day by the pianist with the large, smiling grey-blue eyes and blond hair and the violinist with the dark, curly hair and expressive face were never more convinced that "there is no sex in music." The "beauty and grace" of the composition and the "faultless interpretation by the brilliant composer and artist" were proof enough for these listeners.

The audience "cheered to the echo" when the piece was completed, and the performance had to be repeated.⁴ During the encore, the thrill was heightened when the manuscript fell from Maud's music stand, but "the beautiful thread of melody moved on and on, for Miss Powell had made it her own in every sense."⁵ In a letter dated December 6, 1893, Powell thanked Beach for the "dainty, artistic edition" of the "charming *Romanza*," which she had received the day before and continued to perform that season. She wrote: "Our meeting in Chicago and the pleasure of playing together made a most delightful episode in my Summer's experience. I trust it soon may be repeated."⁶



Maud Powell performed Beach's *Romance* with the composer at the Women's Musical Congress, where they were "cheered to the echo."

Photo autographed for Friedrich Hermann, Powell's harmony teacher in Leipzig, October 1, 1892, Maud Powell Society Archive

No. 25, continued

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Powell thanked Beach for the “dainty, artistic edition” of the “charming Romanza,” that Beach sent her after it was published in late 1893.

Courtesy Library of Congress Music Division,
A. P. Schmidt Company Collection

Amy Beach became a leading representative of the late nineteenth-century Romantic style cultivated by George Chadwick, Arthur Foote, and others of the Boston school; yet she was primarily a self-taught composer with minimal formal training and never studied abroad. A child prodigy, she taught herself to read at three and composed her first piano pieces mentally at four and later played them. Her mother taught her piano at age six and at seven she began playing public recitals. Then she studied piano with Ernst Perabo and harmony and counterpoint one year with organist Junius W. Hill. She translated treatises by Berlioz and Gevaert from which she taught herself orchestration and fugue.

Amy Cheney made her debut as a concert pianist at the age of sixteen. After her marriage at age eighteen to Dr. H. H. A. Beach, a prominent Boston surgeon, in 1885, she limited her solo appearances to charity concerts and focused her energies on composing. She returned to professional public performance after the death of her husband in 1910, touring Europe and then America.

Beach’s earliest large-scale work, Mass in E flat major (1886–89), was performed in Boston in 1892 by the Handel and Haydn Society led by Carl Zerrahn. Its success brought her serious public recognition as a composer and the commission for *Festival jubilate*.

Amy Beach’s Symphony in E minor, Op. 32, “Gaelic,” was the first symphony composed by an American woman. It was premiered in 1896 by the Boston Symphony Orchestra conducted by Emil Paur. Beach first performed her Piano Concerto in C sharp minor, Op. 45, with the Boston Symphony in 1900.

Beach composed few works for violin and piano, but those she did compose she sent to Powell before they were published. Sometime after she completed her Violin Sonata, Op. 34, on June 6, 1896, she sent the manuscript to Powell. In return, Powell sent Beach tickets for her Boston recital with a letter stating that she “and Mrs. Gleason had a delightful try at the Sonata this morning. Needless to say that we couldn’t do it justice playing it *prima vista* – but it is a fine, scholarly work and I should think splendidly effective if properly done.”⁷ The sonata was given its premiere on January 4, 1897, by Franz Kneisel, concertmaster of the Boston Symphony, with Beach at the piano. In 1899 violinist Carl Halir and pianist Teresa Carreño performed the sonata in Berlin, and in 1900, Belgian violinist Eugène Ysaÿe and pianist Raoul Pugno played it in Paris.

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No. 25, continued

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Following their “delightful” visit in the spring of 1898, Beach sent Powell manuscript copies of her latest violin pieces (Three Compositions, Op. 40: *La captive*, *Berceuse*, *Mazurka*). Powell performed the third work, *Mazurka*, for a New England Society concert in Brooklyn, New York, on May 8, 1898.⁸

Throughout her long career, Beach composed successful songs, choral works, chamber music, and piano pieces. The numerous Amy Beach Clubs across America reflected the widespread popularity of her piano music and songs.

In 1924 Beach was elected president of the newly founded Society of American Women Composers. She was a frequent guest at the MacDowell Colony, where she befriended other women composers, including Mary Howe, one of the founders of the National Symphony Orchestra, and Mabel Daniels. Gifted in mathematics and languages, Beach was also a crack pool player. She contributed to ornithology by notating bird songs, which she sometimes used in her music.⁹



Although almost entirely self-taught, Amy Beach became the leading composer of the New England school.

Courtesy Library of Congress Music Division

¹ Edition: *Romance for Violin and Piano*, Op. 23 (Boston: Arthur P. Schmidt, 1893). Dedicated to Maud Powell.

² The manuscript for the *Romance* is in the A. P. Schmidt Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

³ *Chicago Times*, July 7, 1893. *Festival jubilate*, Op. 17, a large choral work with orchestra conducted by Theodore Thomas.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ “Impressions of the Musical Congress,” *The Music Review*, August 1893: 579.

⁶ Maud Powell letter to Amy Beach, 6 December 1893, Special Collections, University of New Hampshire Library.

⁷ Maud Powell letter to Amy Beach, n.d. [1896], University of New Hampshire Library.

⁸ Maud Powell letter to Amy Beach, 16 April [1898], University of New Hampshire Library.

⁹ Additional source on Amy Beach: Adrienne Fried Block, *Amy Beach: Passionate Victorian* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

No. 26

See annotation for No. 16 Bellstedt, Caprice on Dixie

