



# SOUVENIR

Autumn 2015

## Maud Powell Champions Sibelius Concerto

The 150th anniversary of Jan Sibelius's birth prompts our celebration of Maud Powell's friendship with him. Powell biographer Karen Shaffer recently uncovered Maud's letters to the Finnish composer surrounding her American premiere of his violin concerto in New York, Chicago, Cincinnati, and Boston, bringing new light on this historic event.



The American violinist began studying the new work in the spring of 1906. It had been premiered by Carl Halir at the Berlin Singakademie with Richard Strauss conducting on October 19, 1905.

Powell wrote to Sibelius on June 17, 1906, eagerly informing him that she would produce the concerto with Wassily

Safonoff and the New York Philharmonic on November 30 and December 1, 1906. "I cannot tell you how interested I am in the Concerto. I consider it quite the best since the G minor of Bruch. Not only is the solo part so wonderfully written for the instrument but the orchestration is superb."

The Finnish composer recognized the risk the violinist was taking in presenting his work to the American public. He responded: "I am so very pleased to hear that you take interest in my violin concerto and will produce it in America. If I am going to have a good reception in New York, I am convinced it is to you I will owe the great part of the success." (*NY Eve. Post*, 22 Nov. 1906) He endorsed his photograph, "To the Violin Queen, Miss Maud Powell, with gratitude – Jean Sibelius."

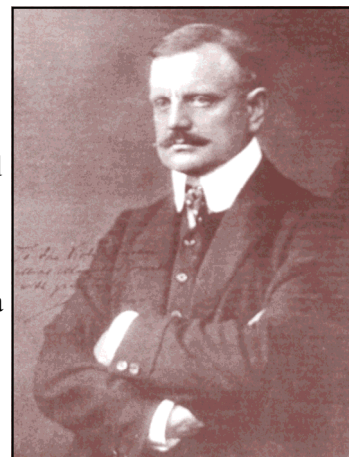
The audience let loose with a great ovation in spite of the strangeness of the work. Camille Saint-Saëns, who had sat in the box on the right side listening "most attentively," was among those who applauded the most heartily. Safonoff was overcome with admiration for the violinist. "What an artist! I do not say this for convention, but from my heart," he wrote of her shortly thereafter. (*The Musical Courier and Concert-Goer*, Dec. 1906) On December 2, the conductor wrote Maud a note:

Dear Miss Powell --- I wish to express to you my warmest admiration for your superb playing of the Sibelius concerto with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra yesterday. To conquer these almost insurmountable difficulties of technic and interpretation requires really an unusually artistic force.

With all sincerity, W. Safonoff

New York critics were variously stunned, appalled and amazed by the music; yet some cautiously admitted that the enthusiasm with which Maud played it indicated that there was more musical substance to it than a first hearing might indicate.

W. J. Henderson, critic for the *New York Sun*, lashed out:



**This concerto is of the Finns, finny. It is of the North, rugged. It is of the Russ, rude. It is of the fiddle, technical. It is almost everything except beautiful. . . . It is bitter as gall and savage as wilderness. Nevertheless in so far as the technics of the violin are concerned it is ultra sophisticated. . . .**

The first movement of this concerto is enough to appall almost any violinist. Now, every one who knows anything knows that Maud Powell is the last of players to seek out a medium for bald technical display. She is too true an artist for that. She must have found something else in this extraordinary concerto to induce her to master its frightful passages. She played it superbly. Her tone was full and brilliant. Her style had virility and breadth and dash. Her finger work was admirable and her bowing glorious. But why did she put all that magnificent art into this sour and crabbed concerto?

(December 1, 1906)

On December 14, Maud sent the criticisms to Sibelius, remarking, "[A]las, the work was not received as well as I could have wished. However, I have not lost courage and shall play it again with the splendid orchestra in Chicago, also in Cincinnati and I hope with the Boston Symphony under Dr. Muck. . . ." Still full of enthusiasm, Maud reassured him: "The concerto went really *very well* and we had a most representative and distinguished audience. And I was proud to be 'making history'." *continued . . .*

## **. . . Maud and Sibelius Triumph in Chicago**

If the New York critics thought that the Finnish composer's violin concerto would be consigned to oblivion, they did not figure on Maud Powell's determination and her great love for the work. Nor did they possess her musical insight. With daring spirit, Maud set out to present in Chicago, Cincinnati, and Boston the concerto that had won her heart.

In Chicago on January 25 and 26, 1907, she collaborated with Frederick Stock, who had succeeded Theodore Thomas as the conductor of the Chicago Orchestra. The reviews the following day indicate that New York critics had failed to understand the work. W. L. Hubbard of the *Chicago Tribune* could not resist speculating that the quality of the orchestra might have made all the difference:

**Maud Powell — “our” Maud Powell . . . — scored a triumph yesterday. . . . She played for the first time here a composition which is one of the most difficult in all violin literature and at the same time one of the most original. And she played it superbly. There are extremely few of her brother artists who could compass its technical intricacies with such surety and seeming ease as she did, and still fewer of them who could interpret it with such masterful skill. . . .**

[T]he [New York] critics were at a loss just what to say. Either because of the unusualness of the work itself, or possibly because of the presentation by the orchestra having been inadequate, they seemed to have failed utterly to grasp the musical content of the composition. Certainly had they heard a performance as complete in note and spirit as was the one Miss Powell and Mr. Stock and his men gave, they could not have failed to discover the striking originality and the inherent musical strength that lie in this greatest of the talented Finnish composer's creations. It must have been that the performance there was inadequate as regards the orchestral part.

The Thomas Orchestra patrons received the new concerto with unmistakable approval. . . . [A]nd when after hearty recalls for Miss Powell she came back, and it was seen that the last movement was to be repeated, everybody smiled with satisfaction. Many gladly would have heard the entire concerto a second time. . . .

It is a work of true significance ... and the performance was truly masterly. Miss Powell is such a comfortable artist. There is nothing of pose or virtuoso affectation and airs about her. She loves the work she is doing, and her heart, soul and mind are wholly in it. The public and the concert surroundings are forgotten, and only the task at hand claims her attention.

She showed keenest pleasure in the splendid work the orchestra did, and there was such fine sympathy between her and Mr. Stock and every one of the men in the orchestra that the performance took on the nature of a triumph for all concerned.

Of her individual work no words too high in praise can be spoken. She commands a technic which places her among the

foremost of the world's violinists, and yet so subservient is this technic made to musical expression and meaning that it is wholly lost sight of. She is a virtuoso in technic and ability, but an artist and unfailing musician — a great one — in spirit. . . . It was an afternoon long to be remembered.

On February 1, Maud Powell wrote to Sibelius, “I am happy to inform you of the triumph of the Concerto in Chicago. The Conductor, Fred. Stock, and the orchestra were all enthusiastic about it and played it wonderfully. Mr. Stock belongs to our generation and worked in complete sympathy with the composition and with my interpretation. Wish you could have heard the performance.” She closed her letter: “I am so overjoyed at the success — we really are to congratulate each other.”

That autumn, a western reporter captured Maud's reflections on the contrast in the work's reception between New York and Chicago.

“I once found a concerto of Jean Sibelius' which appealed to me strongly. It seemed to convey a message to me, and a message which I wished to impart. I tried it in New York. The critics would have none of it. They said I was wasting my time. Yet I felt I could not be mistaken — the message was there, and I would not give it up until I had made others feel what I felt when I played it.

“I tried it again in Chicago. The orchestra tried it, and it seemed, in a way, to appeal to them. We tried it a second time and every player in the orchestra was intensely interested. We played it again and again and I have never seen anything like the hold it secured on us. When I gave it every man in the orchestra felt that he himself was imparting the wonderful message of the piece as much as if he had stood upon the concert stage” — and Madame Powell's brilliant dark eyes fired with enthusiasm, the soul of the artist shone through them as she clasped her hands and continued:

“The concerto simply set me tingling — it was wonderful, and the audience who heard it were held by the same magnetism which had consumed myself and the orchestra. The critics were intensely enthusiastic.

“So there you are — New York would have none of it and yet the Western critics have felt the message which I am sure Sibelius wished to convey. Sibelius was a Finn — his music told of the great ice mountains with the sun shining and the great distances — silent, boundless distances.” (*The Daily Ledger*, Tacoma, Wash., 23 October 1907).

Maud Powell went on to perform the Sibelius concerto in Cincinnati and Boston in 1907 and gave repeat performances in 1911 and 1912 in New York and Boston. She played it into the repertory but could not record it due to the technical limitations of the acoustic recording process. It is now the most recorded 20th century violin concerto, happily justifying Maud Powell's advocacy of the concerto that had won her heart. *By Karen A. Shaffer*

*Note: This is only a small part of the story. The full story will appear on the MPS web site and in the 2d edition of the Maud Powell biography.*

## EYSO Opens 40th Season With Tribute To Maud Powell

The Elgin (Illinois) Youth Symphony Orchestra has chosen to open its 40th season with a special tribute to Maud Powell with the brilliant violinist Rachel Barton Pine as soloist. On Sunday, November 8, 2015, Ms. Pine, an audience favorite, will perform the **Sibelius Violin Concerto** in honor of Maud Powell's groundbreaking premiere of this dramatic concerto in America. The EYSO's energetic Music Director Randal Swiggum will conduct.



## Elgin Symphony Orchestra Plans 2016 Tribute to Maud Powell Featuring Rachel Barton Pine

Violinist **Rachel Barton Pine** will be performing **Dvořák's Violin Concerto** with the **Elgin (Illinois) Symphony Orchestra** during a week-long tribute to Maud Powell. Performances are scheduled for April 1, 2, and 3, 2016. An exciting series of events focusing on Maud Powell will begin on the weekend of March 26th. Powell biographer Karen Shaffer has been invited to participate.

### Maud Powell Meets Dvořák

Maud Powell sought out Antonín Dvořák not long after his arrival in New York in September 1892 to assume his duties as director of the National Conservatory of Music founded by Jeannette Thurber. She was preparing his Violin Concerto in A minor for its New York premiere.

When Powell met Dvořák on November 8, the Bohemian composer warned her that the violinist Joseph Joachim, to whom he dedicated the work, had once said that it was too difficult for any woman to play. Undeterred, Powell proceeded to play the work for him. When she finished, Dvořák arose in great delight to congratulate her, proposing puckishly that he "should write to Joachim at once that he had found a woman who could play his concerto perfectly." She carefully recorded the date in her scrapbook of precious memories and autographs.

Maud Powell performed the Dvořák concerto with piano on tour during the 1892–93 season. She gave its New York premiere the following season, playing it twice to critical acclaim, with Frank Van der Stucken conducting the New York Arion Society orchestra on November 12, 1893, and then with Anton Seidl conducting the New York Philharmonic on April 7, 1894. Dvořák found his way to the artist's room to thank her for her beautiful performance.

**Recommended reading:** *Marion and Emilie Frances Bauer* by Susan E. Pickett, (2014). Available in hardcover, softcover and ebook. [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com). The Bauer sisters were gifted musician/composer friends of Maud Powell's.

### News Bulletins . . .

The Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee turned down the MP Society's application for a stamp commemorating Maud Powell's 150th anniversary. They also turned down an application for composer Amy Beach who shares Maud Powell's birth year.

### "Silent No More: The Woman Composer"

Pamela Blevins, MPS editor of *Signature, Women in Music*, drew a capacity crowd to her illustrated talk featuring recorded music "Silent No More: The Woman Composer" on March 17 at the Transylvania County Public Library in Brevard, NC. Although women have been composing music since ancient times, their work is little known even today and rarely performed. Largely ignored by historians, women have been as committed as men to their art. Women did not simply write pretty little songs and piano pieces. They have composed (and continue to compose) music in every form from chamber music, concertos and symphonies to opera, choral works, tone poems and film music.

Blevins' audience met women of genius and tenacity who refused to remain silent, including Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel, the gifted elder sister of the more famous Felix Mendelssohn; Clara Schumann (wife of Robert Schumann), pianist, composer, mother and the breadwinner of her family; opera superstar and composer Pauline Viardot-Garcia; Dora Pejačević, a defiant Croatian noblewoman who cast aside her class to follow her own path; American Elinor Remick Warren whose music once caused such a sensation that film producer Howard Hughes offered to make her a movie star.



## Help Celebrate the 150th Anniversary of Maud Powell's Birth in 2017

Help us celebrate **Maud Powell's sesquicentennial!** The time is now to begin planning what you will do — a commemorative program? A violin recital? A Trio or Quartet concert? Dedicate your performance of a concerto to her? Perform her Brahms violin concerto cadenza? Choose pieces from *Maud Powell Favorites*? Offer a presentation of her life and work with our Maud Powell powerpoint program? The possibilities are endless — so let us know what you want to do and we will do all we can to support your efforts through the resources of our Maud Powell Society Archive. You don't have to be a violinist to honor this legendary musician!

## Peru Maud Powell Arts Celebration Inspires

The annual **Maud Powell Arts Celebration** in Peru, Illinois, Maud Powell's birthplace, was held on August 21 and 22. Chris Coughlin chairs the Peru Maud Powell Arts Celebration which highlights the talents of local students and professionals whose gifts enrich the Illinois Valley. In addition to hearing a variety of music in numerous concerts, everyone was invited to participate in a community drum circle, experience musical instruments with hands-on, and view photographic art on display. The Maud Powell Arts Celebration will be held again in August 2016. Watch the MPS web site for details.

## Maud Powell String Quartet

The Maud Powell String Quartet, now in its eighth year, continues to receive high approbation for its performances as the premier string quartet of the Elgin (Illinois) Youth Symphony Orchestra. This Honors ensemble is coached by Karen Basrak, cellist in the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. The Quartet explores wide-ranging repertoire with guest artists and coaches, including MPS Board Member Rachel Barton Pine. New members audition and are chosen each school year from among players in the Elgin Youth Symphony Orchestra.

## Maud Powell on BBC Radio 3

English writer, performer, and music journalist David Quantick chose Maud Powell's 1909 recording of Massenet's "Meditation" from "Thais" as one of his favorite historic recordings. Her recording was played and discussed with Rob Cowan on his "Essential Classics" program. Its directness and immediacy appeals to him: "You don't just hear the music; you are literally in the room with her. . . . The last note on that just literally cuts through the years." Cowan noted her "spot-on intonation," and called her "an amazing player, one of the finest of the time." Quantick remarked, "Maud Powell could play you under the table and back again."

## Noted in brief —

- **The Maud Powell Society web site** keeps you up to date on events and includes many of **Maud Powell's articles**, most of which can be found on the "For Young People" page. The web address remains [www.maudpowell.org](http://www.maudpowell.org).
- **Marion Scott biographer and Signature editor Pamela Blevins' biography of Ivor Gurney and Marion Scott, *Song of Pain and Beauty***, details the life and work of these two important figures in British music. To purchase: Contact Pamela Blevins at [pblevins@erols.com](mailto:pblevins@erols.com) or 828-884-8500 or use [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).
- To obtain Maud Powell's recordings, order any of the four CDs, *Maud Powell, The Complete Recordings (1904-1917)*, Vols. 1-4 (Naxos 8.110961, 8.110962, 8.110963, 8.110993) online via The Maud Powell Society's web site, through the "Publications" page at [www.maudpowell.org](http://www.maudpowell.org).
- *Maud Powell Favorites*, an edition of rare violin masterworks including Powell's transcriptions, and violinist Rachel Barton Pine's *American Virtuosa, Tribute to Maud Powell*, Cedille records (CDR 90000 097), can be ordered from The Maud Powell Society. The CD includes selections from *Maud Powell Favorites*. Visit the Publications page of our web site for more information: [www.maudpowell.org](http://www.maudpowell.org). **ON SALE NOW!**



## Fox Valley Orchestra Honors Maud

The **Fox Valley Orchestra**, Aurora, Illinois, presented its "Champion of the Arts" Award to Maud Powell at its Gala on June 28, 2015. Mary Clark Ormond, President of the Aurora Historical Society, accepted the award in Maud Powell's behalf and created and presented a short video depicting this "premier violinist of her time" as a "towering figure in the musical education of a young nation."

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**Souvenir is the Newsletter of the  
Friends of The Maud Powell Society  
for Music and Education**



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## A Message from the Maud Powell Society's President

*Dear Friends,*

A year and a half and counting until January, 2017, when we begin celebrating the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Maud Powell's birth – or to be more formal, her tongue-twisting Sesquicentennial! What an opportunity this is for all of us not only to honor this pioneering home-grown genius, but to celebrate and acknowledge the phenomenal achievements and contributions women made to classical music in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Maud and these courageous women laid a solid foundation for future generations to build upon. And we continue to see their effect well into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. No longer are women in music playing second fiddle to their male counterparts. They are playing first violin, conducting, enjoying solo careers in instruments like the trumpet and cello that were once considered too “un-lady like” for a woman to play. Their compositions are no longer relegated to a silent destiny but are being published, performed and recorded in numbers we didn't think possible in the 1970s.

Maud Powell's Sesquicentennial in 2017 is an opportunity for all of us to reclaim our wider and lesser-known heritage given us by pioneering women musicians of her era, many of whom have been featured in our online magazine *Signature, Women in Music*. Along with Maud Powell, we should be celebrating especially the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the pianist/composer Amy Cheney Beach (1867-1944) and the long-lived composer Margaret Ruthven Lang (1867-1972), significant figures in American musical life who touched hands with Maud.

Follow Maud and she will lead you onto a path of discovery into the awesome story of women musicians who risked much and sacrificed even more to enter, widen and sustain the world of classical music.

Born in Peru, Illinois, on August 22, 1867, Maud would become one of the most important musical figures in North American history and one of the most highly regarded in Europe. In her extensive career, Maud Powell traveled endlessly to perform in cities throughout Britain, Ireland and Europe, Russian, South Africa, Canada, the United States and Hawaii. But her heart remained in the land of her birth where she was a tireless ambassador for music who covered hundreds of thousands of miles crisscrossing a growing nation to bring music to people everywhere.

Maud's Sesquicentennial is an opportunity for all musicians to join in honoring and celebrating Maud's life, art and ideals.

How? A few suggestions: — Celebrate Maud's daring to introduce and gain public acceptance for the Tchaikovsky, Dvořák, and Sibelius violin concertos and even the Brahms concerto at a time when other violinists shied from their challenges.

— Recognize her service to music, championing new composers – including women, Americans, and those of African descent – whose works now enrich the repertoire of the violin.

— Music teachers can point to Maud Powell's recordings — as someone who upheld a high standard of violin playing in musicianship, artistry and technic.

A lot of exciting preparations are underway to enable musicians to honor Maud Powell's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary worldwide.

Our first task has been to let people know where Maud performed. It has been quite thrilling and revealing to put together a spreadsheet with all of Maud Powell's known concert dates from 1885 through 1919. I am still working on it. We will soon be able to make this into a pdf and upload it on our web site.

Secondly, we are preparing themed educational units to enable musicians and teachers to introduce Maud Powell and classical music in the context of her time. For instance, one unit in preparation focuses on the advent of recording technology, using Maud's experience as a pioneer recording artist at the dawn of the acoustic era of recording. The unit enables the presenter to perform some of the works she recorded and also to play her recordings.

Thirdly, I have been typing Maud Powell's articles and interviews as I go through the archive, working on the 2d edition of my MP biography. My plan is to continue placing them on our web site and perhaps also publish a book of her collected writings, including her invaluable program notes and letters.

Fourthly, we have just had Maud Powell's microfilmed scrapbooks transferred to a digital format. This is an important step in preserving the archive yet it will take many months and intense labor to make these images accessible in some way.

Finally, we are still attempting to create a stand-alone DVD of our audio/visual presentation on Maud. We want to see it made into a full documentary. So far, we have not found the resources and technical assistance necessary but we are working on it!

These are our current projects, gearing up for 2017 celebrations. We invite musicians all over the world to join us in paying tribute to an artist who dared to break the mold and to those who came before and after her.

**This is OUR heritage. It is OURS to Celebrate!**

Your friendship and support make it possible for us to continue bringing Maud Powell's inspiration to people throughout the world. We rely on your financial support exclusively. Tax-deductible donations of \$15, \$25, \$50 help keep us going while larger contributions sustain the MP Society's existence. Please join in helping us gear up for a grand year celebrating Maud Powell's 150<sup>th</sup>. *With warmest good wishes, Karen A. Shaffer*



**150 BOWS FOR MAUD – STRING PLAYERS TO THE STAGE!**

**150 BOWS FOR MAUD – TAKE A BOW!**

**LET'S CELEBRATE IN 2017!**



**Your tax-deductible contributions make all of our work possible.**

**You can Donate via Paypal at [www.maudpowell.org](http://www.maudpowell.org)**

Dear Karen:

I am looking forward to all the events celebrating **Maud Powell's Sesquicentennial**. I am proud of the achievements of the Maud Powell Society for Music and Education and pleased to support its work! Here is my contribution in support of all the good work you are doing in reaching more people than ever before with the inspiring message of Maud Powell's life and legacy.

**Enclosed is my tax-deductible contribution.** I have made my check payable to The Maud Powell Society. **Please be sure to send me the next Friends' newsletter.** **YOU CAN DONATE via PAYPAL at [www.maudpowell.org](http://www.maudpowell.org).**

**Trustee \$2,500 annual donation \_\_\_\_\_**

A position of honor, trust and service held by one who is committed to the purpose of The Maud Powell Society and willing to lend their name, financial resources and advice to forward its mission.

**Friend \$1,000 \_\_\_\_\_ \$500 \_\_\_\_\_ \$250 \_\_\_\_\_ \$100 \_\_\_\_\_ \$150 \_\_\_\_\_ (honoring Maud's 150th!)**

**\$75 \_\_\_\_\_ \$50 \_\_\_\_\_ \$35 \_\_\_\_\_ \$25 \_\_\_\_\_ other \$ \_\_\_\_\_**

**\_\_\_\_\_ I WOULD LIKE TO PARTICIPATE IN CELEBRATING MAUD POWELL'S SESQUICENTENNIAL OR TO ASSIST IN PREPARATIONS FOR IT. PLEASE CONTACT ME.**

\_\_\_\_\_ I have set forth names and addresses of friends you can place on the Society's mailing list.

\_\_\_\_\_ I would like to connect you with potential major individual or corporate donors.

\_\_\_\_\_ Please send me information on the Maud Powell children's book or \_\_\_\_\_.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

**Please return to The Maud Powell Society, 68 Grandview Ave., Brevard, NC 28712**



The Maud Powell Society's purpose is to educate the general public about the life and art of Maud Powell and her contributions to American musical life as well as to the art of violin playing. In addition, the Society is established to further Maud Powell's musical ideals by sponsoring educational projects and programs to promote music in education and public awareness of the contributions and achievements of women in music. Founded in 1986, The Maud Powell Society is a tax-exempt, non-profit corporation, operated exclusively for charitable and literary purposes. Contributions are tax deductible to the full extent of the law.