

Introduction

On a spring day in New York City, I was in the catacombs of St. Bart's on Park Avenue. In a room filled with canned goods to feed the homeless, my friend Paolo Bordignon (organist and choirmaster of St. Bart's) and I were moving pallets of tomatoes and peaches to uncover shelves of neglected music. We found another piece by Amy Beach with each can of fruit we moved.

The dust on the boxes confirmed just how hidden these treasures were. On numerous occasions, my friend exclaimed, "I can't believe this. I had no idea this was down here." We found multiple copies of sacred choral works by Beach, in perfect condition, bound years ago by a professional binder, sharing space next to canned goods.

Even in an age of online repositories, these discoveries were exciting. Beach's choral works are carefully cataloged through extensive scholarship, most notably by Adrienne Fried Block and Jean Reigles; however, that does not mean they are accessible. It is even less likely you have heard a performance of them. Paolo and I looked at each other in amazement and wondered how this could be the case.

It is easy to blame it on changing tastes, but that has not affected the works of other notable Victorians from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Plenty of writing seeks to answer this question through sociological constructs, namely the place of women in classical music and upper-class family life during the turn of the twentieth century. Over the last generation, research into Amy Beach's works has sought to correct this, yet several of her choral works remain inaccessible. For whatever reason, a lack of familiarity is often endemic to Amy Beach's experience as a composer.

"I had no idea this was down here" sums it up perfectly.

Historical Context

At the turn of the century, the landscape of choral music in America gave Beach an ample breeding ground for her compositions. American singing societies such as the Cincinnati May Festival, the Apollo Club of Chicago, the Mendelssohn Club of Pittsburgh, and the Handel and Haydn Society of Boston all came of age in or around Beach's lifetime. These were undoubtedly informed or inspired by the numerous choir festivals in England. Much of the standard oratorio repertoire performed during this time was either written for or made prominent by festivals in Birmingham, Leeds, Norwich, and the famous Three Choirs Festival in Gloucester. While Beach may not have participated directly in one of these, she likely benefited from their influence – whether assimilating these scores in her self-directed study or through the inspiration these choral organizations and their concerts provided. Moreover, the Industrial Revolution in America produced a class of people with new-found wealth and leisure time. This translated into a boom for choral organizations as amateurs flocked to their ranks.¹

Churches also grew into prominent exponents of choral performance. Some of the nation's most respected musicians worked for the church, especially in cultural centers like Boston and New York City, where Beach made homes. The list of organists and choirmasters who worked in these metropolitan areas reads like a venerable "who's who" of early American art music: Lowell Mason, Horatio Parker, George Whitefield Chadwick, Dudley Buck, T. Tertius Noble, John Knowles Paine, Charles Ives, Clarence Dickinson, and Beach's close friend David McKay Williams all left an indelible mark on the church and choral music in the early twentieth century. Before making his name as a conductor, even Leopold Stokowski began at St. Bartholomew's in New York City. Beach's output as a composer, specifically choral music, was deeply influenced by these cultural trends. Her output is tailored toward the rich resources of sacred institutions and the endless supply of singing organizations that cropped up throughout the United States.

Songs and choral works figure prominently among Beach's compositional output. Adrienne Fried Block reports that writing songs was a way to clear her mind at the end of the day. "Beach claimed that song writing was recreation for her; when she felt herself going stale while working on larger pieces, she would stop and finish the day's work by writing a song. 'It

freshens me up,' she claimed. 'I really consider that I have given myself a special treat when I have written a song.'² Beach surely felt this way while writing her choral works. Many of her choral works contain large vocal solos, creating a Victorian form of the traditional English verse anthem.

Beach was very sensitive to the range and requirements of the singers. In a letter dated April 10, 1907, she negotiated extreme notes in her music with her publisher Arthur P. Schmidt Co. to find more comfortable solutions. "The high A I can easily modify by choice notes if you would kindly return the manuscript." She went on to discuss low notes for the basses as well and clarified that she would like young singers to find the music "practicable."³

We can categorize Beach's works by their scope and by the context for which Beach wrote them. Her large-scale works include the Grand Mass in E-flat major and *The Canticle of the Sun*. Beach wrote medium-sized festival works such as the *Festival Jubilate*, *Wedding Cantata*, and *The Chambered Nautilus*. The rest of her works are small- to medium-scale works for the church and small secular choral works for male and female voices. The church works fall into two categories: small-scale works written in a modified motet or Anglican style with accompaniment and elaborate verse anthems that intermingle solo and choral sections. Her earliest choral compositions were a set of chorales written in 1882. Her last works in 1944 were compositions for women's chorus: "Pax nobiscum" and "The Ballad of the P. E. O." Choral music thus bookended her career.

These choral works were often an essential source of income in addition to being works of personal devotion. Block notes that late in Beach's life, *The Canticle of the Sun* and *Let This Mind Be in You* were her most performed compositions.⁴ Beach's will bequeathed her royalties to the MacDowell Association, and these choral compositions provided the colony with an important source of revenue.⁵ Her secular choral works, especially for male and female choruses, were written out of a sense of demand. Block writes, "The demand for women's choral music grew during the first decade of the new century. Men as well as women responded to that need, but women seem to have a special affinity for the medium. . . . [P]ublishers, including Schmidt and G. Schirmer, instituted women's choral series to serve the growing nationwide market."⁶ When taken together, Beach's choral output includes thirty-six sacred works (including the large-scale Grand Mass) and thirty-five secular choral works. Only her solo songs rival this output. When the songs and choral works are combined, Beach's output comes into focus. She was a prolific composer for the human voice.

Religious Context

Amy Beach's beliefs in religion profoundly influenced her sacred music. These religious views were formed at an early age by her mother and religious upbringing. About her religious education, Block writes: "She attended Sunday School at the Central Congregational Church in Chelsea and fell in love with her teacher – the only teacher other than her mother that she would have during the next few years. At age five she took to reading the Scriptures aloud, which she did with the clarity and emphasis of an adult."⁷

She carried religion with her through the rest of her life. As a young adult, she was an active participant at Trinity Episcopal Church in Boston. Scholars have questioned her membership, reporting that she and her husband's names are not on the church's roll.⁸ Despite this, we know that Phillips Brooks (1835–1893), rector of the church and famous for writing the hymn "O Little Town of Bethlehem," was very influential. Jean Reigles reports in her dissertation, "The Choral Music of Amy Beach," that "she and Brooks had frequent discussions regarding the topics of his sermons."⁹ In 1911, after the death of her husband, she joined and was baptized at Emmanuel Church (Episcopal) in Boston.¹⁰

Upon moving to New York City in 1924, she immediately became established at St. Bartholomew's Church on Park Avenue. Her integration into the community and her friendship with music director David McKay Williams (1887–1978) led her to write some of her most interesting sacred choral compositions, many of which she dedicated to Williams. *Let This Mind be in You*, *Canticle of the Sun*, and *Christ in the Universe* all date to this inflection point in her career. Beach's works featured prominently in the church's centennial anniversary in 1935, and "Hearken unto Me" was written specifically for the celebration.¹¹

Beach went on to say that her sacred choral music held a special place for her among her works. "I think my church music appeals to me more than anything I have done. I have written anthems and oratorios and a whole Episcopal Service with great joy, and they have become a part of me more than anything I have done, I am sure."¹² Her religious devotion continued to her death. Upon her death, Beach bequeathed her family jewels to Emmanuel Church in Boston, where she was baptized. Emmanuel Church declined the gift, so she offered them to St. Bartholomew's.¹³ They hold a prominent place in the church to this day, having been ensconced in the church's prized communion chalice.

The Grand Mass in E-Flat Major

Amy Beach's most substantial choral composition was also her first major work. She began writing the Grand Mass in E-flat major in 1886. The project culminated in a premiere with the Handel and Haydn Society of Boston in 1892. Beach wrote the work for a quartet of soloists, full chorus, and orchestra.

A Grand Mass is a daunting proposition for a master composer, let alone an eighteen-year-old forced to educate herself after being denied even a composition teacher. A setting of the Mass proper, though, became a primary interest for Dr. Beach. He "incited her . . . to work on an audacious project, a mass for solo quartet, chorus, organ, and orchestra."¹⁴ He believed this would solidify her reputation as a substantial American composer – a designation that would be more consistent with their social standing than just a performer or teacher.

Beach wrote the vocal and choral parts in 1886 and 1887. She worked on the orchestral score in 1889. Schmidt Publishing Company in Boston published the piano-vocal score before the premiere, which was uncommon. It allowed the work an opportunity to be reviewed by the *Boston Beacon* before it was performed. This led to interest in the work and its premiere in 1892. The Handel and Haydn Society of Boston, conducted by Carl Zerrahn, premiered the work. This would be the first time a major institution in the United States performed a multi-movement choral and orchestral work by an American female composer.¹⁵

The Mass was, by most accounts, a success. Philip Hale, music critic for the *Boston Times*, wrote, "the Mass is a work of long breath. It shows knowledge, skill, and above all application, patience, and industry."¹⁶ Block writes, "In general most critics agreed that Beach's Mass was a noble work that placed her – as one said – 'among the foremost rank of American composers.'"¹⁷ Despite this, the Schmidt Company never published the full score. The Mass lay dormant until renewed interest in the work commenced over a hundred years later. The only performing edition available was a facsimile reprint of the manuscript until A-R Publications produced the new edition prepared by this author in 2018.¹⁸

The Mass is written in the oratorio style, using a multi-movement structure for the Gloria and Credo. The Gloria is split into four movements: Gloria, Laudamus Te, Qui Tollis, and Quoniam. The Credo is a single movement, but the three sections that comprise the setting are formally and thematically distinct, giving it the character of a multi-movement

setting. The Sanctus and Benedictus are also separate. The Kyrie, Graduale, and Agnus Dei are each single movements inclusive of the text.

Beach favors thematic development over traditional formal structure. For example, the Kyrie follows a ternary model, but the return of the theme is condensed. The Gloria and the Credo and Et Resurrexit are declamatory in style and eschew formal concerns for a more through-composed model, providing variations on the initial motive throughout the movement. The opening theme and fanfare-type gesture of mm. 65–67 make up the material for the entire opening movement of the Gloria. The orchestral openings of the Credo and Et Resurrexit are the impetus for these movements.

Solos play a prominent role in movements where the text is more introspective or devotional. The Et Incarnatus Est is an extended soprano solo. The Laudamus Te opens with a trio accompanied by strings and harp and is followed by an expressive alto solo. The Qui Tollis, Benedictus, and Agnus Dei are dialogues between soloists and the chorus.

The Graduale, a movement entirely for solo tenor between the Gloria and Credo, was a late addition to the Mass. It was composed at the behest of the Handel and Haydn Society for their star tenor Italo Campanini (1846–96). Even the orchestral parts were completed before the movement was written – it was inserted at the end of the book as opposed to its proper place after the Quoniam. It was never included in an updated piano–vocal score.

The choral writing is mainly homophonic with light touches of counterpoint. The lone fugue is the Quoniam movement – traditionally a fugue in large-scale Masses by classical composers. The fugue consists of multiple expositions that culminate in homophonic conclusions. After each section, an orchestral interlude creates a transition to the next exposition. This formal design results in a somewhat abrupt ending, but Beach compensates for this through sonic saturation by employing the entire performing forces, resulting in an exuberant conclusion.

Thematically the Mass is unified by the opening of the work. The first two measures of the Kyrie recapitulate at different moments in the Mass, most notably in the Sanctus and the Dona Nobis Pacem. The Sanctus begins with a direct quotation of the Kyrie theme. The Dona Nobis Pacem begins with the Kyrie theme in the bass (m. 172), after which the theme is part of the overall texture.

Other unifying devices occur in the transition to the Dona Nobis Pacem, including quotations of the Benedictus and the four-note gesture deployed extensively in the Credo (mm. 158–66). Beach avoids the practice of reprising the Hosanna at the end of the Benedictus. Instead, she writes

a brief seven-measure conclusion in a more ethereal effect (mm. 124–31) than the exuberant Hosanna that ends the Sanctus (mm. 45–91).

Harmonically, the Mass is Romantic in nature, employing chromatic harmonies. Beach enjoys creating tension by moving through key centers using diminished and augmented-sixth chords. Beach's most common harmonic characteristic is her penchant for building to large climaxes, reminiscent of the English Victorian tradition. These climaxes appear in all the major movements, including the Kyrie (mm. 67–75), Gloria (mm. 246–74), Quoniam (mm. 120–53), Et Resurrexit (mm. 338–52), and Agnus Dei (mm. 112–28).

The orchestration is large, requiring a full complement of winds and strings, four horns, three trumpets in F (a common Romantic orchestration used by Bruckner and Mahler), three trombones, timpani, harp, and organ. The organ and harp parts are of particular interest. The opening sonority of the entire mass is an E-flat chord from the organ alone instead of the orchestra – a statement of individuality for the work and composer. The accompaniment of the *Et Incarnatus Est* was originally an organ solo for the entirety of the movement. The composer added strings later at the “*crucifixus*” text, as evidenced by an inserted handwritten page in the manuscript score. The harp plays an extensive cadenza at the opening of the Agnus Dei. A sublime cello solo accompanies the alto in the second half of the *Laudamus Te*. The overall effect of the orchestration is like that of the Requiems of Verdi and Berlioz: powerful in tutti sections, but economical and transparent for sensitive musical moments.

An immediate and intense conversation regarding the role of women in classical music, specifically in composition, followed the success of Beach's Mass. Artists such as Dvořák and Rubinstein made unfortunate comments regarding the ability of female artists. Beach's Mass stands in stark contrast to those opinions held by many at the time. Through her compositions, women's suffrage in classical music had a new, though unassuming, advocate in Beach – and this body of work would prove those who stood in opposition to female composers as foolish.

Early Period Sacred Works

Her marriage, while restrictive by modern-day standards, was generally remembered fondly by Beach. She presented Dr. Beach a song each year on his birthday, sometimes a setting of his poetry. In turn, he lavished jewels on her and provided her with a beautiful home filled with parties and

music. While giving up her life as a concert artist was likely a struggle, she later remembered her switch to composition as a chance to become even more notable. She wrote, "Though I had not deliberately chosen, the work had chosen me. My compositions gave me a larger field. From Boston, I could reach out to the world."¹⁹

Regardless of how some people felt about women composing, Beach's notoriety increased after the success of the *Mass*. This newfound fame led to a major commission for the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893, which celebrated the anniversary of Columbus's famed voyage. Beach composed the *Festival Jubilate*, op. 17, to open the fair's Woman's Building on May 1, 1893. The work was deemed "dignified and elevated in style."²⁰ These words must have been well received by Beach since the festival organizers almost rejected the work solely due to her gender.²¹

The structure is sectional, dividing the motivic material and the musical texture by text. Psalm 100 has a myriad of opportunities for exuberance and introspection. Beach dramatically explores them all. The harmonic language, though Romantic, is more stable than the chromatic sections of the *Mass*. Modulations involve fewer diminished chords, favoring secondary dominants and more direct modulations. Beach may have used Baroque cantatas and odes for ideas regarding design by evidence of the largo *maestoso* opening and grave transition between the second fugue and the coda. These transitional largo sections remind us of festival odes written by Purcell and Handel.

The *Festival Jubilate* exhibits a significant maturation in contrapuntal technique. After a fanfare and orchestral introduction, the chorus presents a fugue on the opening verse of Psalm 100. Whereas the *Mass*' lone fugue is sectional with expositions being interrupted, the opening fugue to the *Jubilate* is more fluid as entrances connect more succinctly. One can sense that Beach felt more comfortable with her contrapuntal technique, treating the orchestra more *colla parte* (doubling the voices) and not relying on a separate texture to help keep the music moving forward. After a meditative section that contemplates the Lord's goodness, Beach employs a second fugue displaying similar maturity. Even in homophonic sections, Beach allows the voices more independence – though glimpses of the *Mass*' more declamatory style are present in the exuberant *vivace* (Schmidt edition, p. 14) and the ending "Gloria Patri" (Schmidt edition, p. 34).

Beach spent these early years focused on her larger concert works. However, she also wrote several smaller choral pieces used as service music. *O Praise the Lord, All Ye Nations*, op. 7, was composed in 1891 for

the consecration of her close friend, Phillips Brooks, as Bishop of Massachusetts. She wrote three choral responses, including settings of the “Nunc Dimittis,” “With Prayer and Supplication,” and “Peace I Leave with You.” Three anthems for feast days were produced in “Bethlehem” and “Peace on Earth” for Christmas and “Alleluia, Christ is Risen” for Easter.

These works show Beach at her most economical to date while not sacrificing her voice and creativity. *O Praise the Lord All Ye Nations* and the Three Responses date before the *Festival Jubilate*, and one sees the similarities. Beach uses common-tone relationships, as seen in mm. 63–67 of *O Praise the Lord All Ye Nations*. A C-sharp diminished chord is followed by a B-flat chord in second inversion, only to return to a D major in first inversion. This common-tone relationship gives Beach a varied vocabulary in her smaller works, while avoiding an inaccessible harmonic language. We see similar motions by common tone in “With Prayer and Supplication” and “Peace I Leave with You.”

“Bethlehem” and “Alleluia Christ is Risen” remain in this economical style; however, we see Beach break out of these constraints in her Christmas anthem, “Peace on Earth.” Beach sets the familiar text, “It Came Upon the Midnight Clear,” with a fluid sense of homophony and polyphony that characterize her later works. Her sense of drama is also more profound, illuminating each verse with just the right texture and mood. “Peace on Earth” is also the first small church work where Beach uses a soloist and duet during the piece, a form she preferred in her later church music – a welcome addition to her compositional arsenal given her penchant for songwriting.

“Peace On Earth” also uses the organ in a more independent way than previous works. The work begins with a fifteen-measure organ introduction. It accompanies the choir for the first verse but then dialogues with the choir in subsequent sections. The organ accompaniment in the middle section partners perfectly with the soloists and allows Beach to display her capability in art song writing. In Beach’s subsequent works, we will see the organ play a more prominent role, and her ability to write for this complicated instrument continues to improve.

That this piece is not in the standard repertoire for churches today is evidence that Beach sometimes suffers from a general lack of familiarity. “Peace on Earth” is worthy of performance by the most outstanding church choirs while accessible for any ensemble.

Beach concluded her early period with two ambitious choral works. *Help Us, O God!*, op. 50 (1903) is Beach’s lone attempt at a sectional motet in the

style of a Bach or Brahms motet. The Service in A, op. 63, is her first multi-movement work intended for a church service.

Help Us, O God! is one of Beach's few purely a cappella works, and one of her longest small-form sacred choral works. The work is comprised of texts from the book of Psalms and is designed in a sectional form that uses different voice textures in the style of Bach's "Jesu Meine Freude." The work is contrapuntally dense and harmonically progressive.

Despite the varied use of vocal texture, the lack of organ accompaniment restrains Beach from creating the dramatic contrasts found in earlier large-scale works. The primary device for this motet is the pure technique of composition. We see this in the fugue that ends the work – her most complex attempt at the form to date.

The Service in A embraces typical Anglican choral style. The primary responsibility of the choral parts is to proclaim the text in a melodic yet clear fashion. The organ features prominently as an equal partner with the voices. The harmonic language is decidedly Victorian. Beach deftly moves through keys without overly audacious sonorities – something that we do not expect in Anglican church music until the mature works of Herbert Howells (1892–1983). She employs suspension and augmented leading tones generously throughout the work.

As with the church works of Stanford, solos are important in these works. The "Te Deum" employs a soprano solo as an obbligato to the chorus. The slow section of the work uses a bass and alto solo. The "Magnificat" contains an extensive soprano solo, something common to settings of this text and likely a nod to Mary, who claims the text in the biblical story. The "Benedictus" and "Jubilate Deo" also contain extensive soprano solos, while the "Nunc Dimittis" uses a bass soloist.

Choral unison singing is another device Beach had not yet employed but is relatively common in Anglican service music. The "Te Deum" begins with an extended passage of choral unison singing, undoubtedly meant to illuminate the first moment of choral harmony on the word: "Holy!" (m. 47). The end of the "Te Deum," "Nunc Dimittis," and "Jubilate Deo" contain similar moments.

Each piece is unique based on the character of the text. In earlier compositions, Beach created contrasting dramatic effects to suit the text; but in these works, as we see in "Help Me, O God," she prefers a more unified character throughout, choosing instead to paint the text with compositional technique and ingenuity. While Anglican composers have sometimes created structural unity in service music through repeated motives, especially during the "Gloria Patri," Beach shows no such desire.

Despite this similarity to the preceding motet, the compositional language and style are much different, especially in Beach's use of counterpoint. The polyphony is almost nonexistent in these service pieces. Imitation is briefly used at the end of "Benedictus" and "Magnificat" during the text "as it was in the beginning." She forgoes this technique in the "Jubilare Deo" and "Nunc Dimittis," preferring unison writing.

It seems Beach regarded these works in a more serious style than her previous church works. Beach uses 4/2 meter, but labels it cut time which, like "Help Me, O God!," shows the influence of large works by Bach and Brahms. Both composers used this time signature in serious sacred works such as the B minor Mass, *Ein Deutsches Requiem*, and *Geistliches Lied*. Otherwise, the practice was uncommon until editors in the early twentieth century began using the meter to transcribe Renaissance music.

Early Period Secular Works

Beach's most significant contributions to concert works date from her early period. The "Gaelic" Symphony, Piano Concerto, and *Jephthah's Daughter* were all written before 1910. Her significant large-scale chamber works, except for the piano trio, were written before 1907. While she wrote secular choral music throughout her life, the most significant concert works – *Three Shakespeare Choruses*, op. 39; *Sylvania*, *A Wedding Cantata*, op. 46; *The Sea-Fairies*, op. 59; and *The Chambered Nautilus*, op. 66 – were also composed before 1907.

Beach often wrote her secular choral music for either all-female (SSA) or all-male choirs (TTB). There are sporadic secular works for SATB chorus, but the bulk of the works divide the genders, which is true even for the large-scale works. *Sylvania* is the only large-scale work of the four for SATB chorus – the rest are for SSA chorus. *The Sea-Fairies* and *The Chambered Nautilus* require orchestral accompaniment.

The *Three Shakespeare Choruses* were published in 1897. Written for treble voices, these pieces are the perfect fusion of English madrigal influence and nineteenth-century part songs. Romantic part songs were an important part of the European choral repertory in the nineteenth century. Schumann, Mendelssohn, and Schubert all contributed to this catalog, and these pieces exhibit this influence, especially in the decidedly early nineteenth-century Germanic harmonic language. However, Beach's sensitivity to the English text led her to include madrigal-style imitative writing and tone painting in these intimate and beautiful settings.

Sylvania: A Wedding Cantata was published in 1901 and is indicative of a light secular cantata. It was premiered in 1905 at a private performance in Chickering Hall. The *Boston Globe* warmly received the work. The reviewer wrote, "The work is illustrative of a sylvan wedding, and both lines and music are redolent throughout of the whisperings of the forest, the caroling of birds and songs of elves and fairies. Like a midsummer night's dream, it carries the auditor away into an age where all the world is young and innocent and beautiful."²² Composed in five parts, the piece includes a cast of five soloists, a mixed chorus (her only large-scale secular work for SATB chorus), and an accompaniment for piano or orchestra. The text was "freely adapted from the German" by the Boston musician Frederick W. Bancroft (1856–1914).²³

The Sea-Fairies and *The Chambered Nautilus* were Beach's most notable contributions to secular choral music, specifically to major works for treble chorus. Both pieces use four-part treble choirs and two soloists: soprano and contralto. The orchestral requirements for both works are almost the same: flutes, clarinets, horns, piano, and strings, though *The Chambered Nautilus* also requires bassoons. In both pieces, the piano plays an outsized role in the orchestration.

The Sea-Fairies is a single-movement piece in strophic form. The orchestra carries much of the thematic material while the chorus sings the text homophonically over the accompaniment's images of the sea. Arpeggios from the pianist abound while orchestral instruments add to the color and texture in static material. Beach relies heavily on the orchestration to paint pictures of undulating waves.

The Chambered Nautilus uses many of the same ideas as *The Sea-Fairies*, especially regarding orchestration, use of piano, harmonic ambiguity, and primacy of the text in both choral material and in how the orchestration paints the images of the poetry. However, Beach treats the choir much more independently. There are more individual lines, more imitation, and more development of thematic material.

The Chambered Nautilus was commissioned by Victor Harris of the St. Cecilia Club of New York. Beach finished the work during the summer of 1907, and the work's first performance was in 1908 by the St. Cecilia Club, who made it a staple of their repertoire in subsequent years.²⁴ A 1907 letter from American music theorist Percy Goetschius praised the work by contrasting it with modernist trends:

I have just spent a most delightful hour with your truly exquisite "Chambered Nautilus" and wish to tell you, warm from my first glowing impression, how keenly

I enjoyed it . . . in this day of dreadful disease . . . one might call the Debussy-disease – or Strauss or Max Reger-disease, . . . I am so glad that we have at least one *American* composer who is not affected by the plague. God bless you!²⁵

Goetschius' evaluation is humorous given the work's similarity to *La Mer* in its sea imagery.

Amy Beach's world was about to change in 1910, and her style and compositional focus changed with it. The death of her husband in 1910 saw Beach turn more toward the church and her faith. Her ability to travel outside of Boston gave her opportunities to vary her musical taste and influences. Her integration into different churches and relationships with more musicians inspired her to hone her skills as a composer of sacred choral music. During the second half of her life, her choral output would include her most performed works, some of the most important parts of her legacy, and some of her own favorite compositions.

Middle Period

After Henry Beach's untimely death in 1910, Amy Beach had the double-edged sword of a new life. Despite the freedom that Beach took advantage of through traveling and promoting herself as a composer and pianist, she was also grief-stricken. Block writes, "She would spend well over a year grieving before she could resume performing, and even then, she would find the life of a traveling pianist too stressful."²⁶ When studying her output, there is a notable gap between 1910 and 1915. Whether it was out of grief or necessity, her life was most certainly interrupted.

Amy Beach's choral compositions after her hiatus continued to display her love of writing for the voice. These works expand on the style she developed while writing the *Service in A* and "Peace on Earth." In the years ahead, she continued to treat each line sensitively but did away with the confinement of fugue and polyphony. Soloists were employed often, and the organ continued to be a prominent participant in the action. Beach's harmonic language continued to exploit borrowed chords and common-tone modulations, especially in her smaller works; however, in grand anthems and larger works, her chromaticism became more progressive and intense, especially in her choices of melodic material. Beach found her voice in these works, and she would speak with it through the rest of her career.

Her four-part setting of "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name" has all the characteristics of a composer jumping back into the pool. Written with a secular text originally for the Panama-Pacific Exposition in California,

the work was reissued with Edward Perronet's notable sacred text by Schmidt in 1915. The work is a delightful setting and the most accessible work thus far – its only modulations are two four-measure moves to the mediant, a noticeable departure from Beach's standard procedure before.

If "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name" was Amy picking up her pen again, "Thou Knowest, Lord" was Amy being cathartic. The text by Jane Borthwick is hard to ignore, given Beach's life circumstance and her return to musical composition.

Thou knowest, Lord the weariness and sorrow
 Of all sad hearts that come to Thee for rest;
 Cares of today, and burdens of tomorrow,
 Blessings implored and signs to be confessed;
 We come before Thee at Thy gracious word,
 And lay them at Thy feet:
 Thou knowest, Lord!
 Thou knowest all the past; how long and blindly,
 Lost on the mountains dark, the wanderer strayed;
 How the Good Shepherd followed,
 And how kindly He bore it home,
 upon his shoulders laid;
 And healed the bleeding wounds and soothed his pain,
 And brought back life, and hope, and strength again.

It is difficult not to think about Beach reading the last line of this second stanza and picturing herself returning to her former strength. The author of the poem goes on to speak of "future gleams of gladness" and finding "a hiding place, a rest, a home." "Thou Knowest, Lord," feels like a statement of reemergence for Amy.

The piece is a welcome return to the Beach we began to see at the turn of the twentieth century. Written in the verse anthem form, it is strophic, with each strophe alternating between soloist and chorus. The piece also employs a more progressive harmonic language, easily moving through keys and chromatic alterations, especially in melodic material.

The final verse speaks of the Lord's gentle call. Beach portrays this by having the chorus sing on a unison E-flat for twenty-one measures, only to give the chorus the tonic sonority for the final chord. During this chant, Beach provides the organist a recapitulation of melodic material. The effect of this texture is stunning, given the dense nature of the rest of the piece. It is as if Amy gives one last sigh of relief that her life is beginning to progress again.

Amy Beach seemed to be quite influenced by the texts she chose. When presented with an English poetic text, like "Thou Knowest Lord," she

employed a Victorian expressiveness, using a verse anthem form and progressive chromaticism. However, when given a biblical text, she preferred writing in a more conservative form or older style. She often telegraphs this by writing the title in Latin, even though the piece's text is in English. Her *Four Canticles*, op. 78, display this practice.

Beach wrote her *Four Canticles* of 1916 for SATB chorus and organ. They are closer in style to the Service in A due to the easily discernible text setting. However, they still display Beach as an early twentieth-century American composer through her use of augmented leading tones and fluid chromaticism – frequently seen in many works of comparable composers from New England at the time.

Beach conceived the pieces as motets with organ accompaniment. Beach provides new music with each line of new text. She often uses imitation at the beginning of these new sections, but its deployment is brief. The preferred texture for these works is non-declamatory homophony. The lines retain independence, but Beach uses imitative counterpoint sparingly.

We also see this older style in the lack of solo writing. There is an obligato soprano solo in “Bonum Est Confiteri,” and “Benedic, Anima Mea” opens with a bass solo that is strikingly short when compared to “Thou Knowest, Lord.” This lack of extended solos creates a clear contrast between the pieces Beach considers one part art song, one part choral work, and the pieces she conceives as strictly in anthem or motet form.

The raised fifth and flat-sixth, though certainly used before, become important harmonic devices for Beach. In the opening of “Bonum Est Confiteri,” we see both in the organ part (mm. 3, 10, and 12). These chromatic alterations, and others like raised fourths and sevenths, can be found throughout the other Canticles. In the opening of “Benedic, Anima Mea,” the raised fifth features prominently in measure 3. In “Deus Misereatur,” fourths and sevenths are raised but often in triadic formulae, so they feel like raised fifths (mm. 1–2, 4–5, 7–10).

Whereas the organ part is a collaborative partner in Beach's Victorian verse anthems, the organ is much more subservient in these motet-style works. The organ's material matches the choir with more frequency. The introductions and interludes are sparser than in verse anthem-style compositions. The technical requirements are much less demanding. Notably, “Benedic, Anima Mea” contains Beach's only specific registration requirement in her works, asking that trumpet stops be used in the first two measures.

This contrast between the newer and older styles continues to appear, though on a smaller scale, with her subsequent two works, *Constant*

Christmas, op. 95, and *Benedictus Es Domine*, op. 103. *Constant Christmas* is a setting of a poem by Phillips Brooks, Bishop of Massachusetts and her longtime friend. Beach tempers her chromaticism, certainly a requirement of the text and possibly the performance context. It begins with an extended duet between alto and soprano. The chorus enters and concludes the piece in a simple homophonic fashion, proudly inviting us to run to the manger. *Benedictus Es, Domine*, displays the style used in the Canticle. The soloist occupies an obbligato role except for in the first six measures. Beach treats the choral parts more independently and uses imitative counterpoint at the end as she did in the Service in A. Both pieces use an economy of style that makes them delightful.

Beach's other sacred compositions from this period – *Lord of the Worlds Above*, op. 109; *Around the Manger*, op. 115; *Benedicte Omnia Opera*, op. 121; and the *Communion Responses*, op. 122 – also display these general characteristics. *Benedicte*, written for David McKay Williams, and the Communion Service, written for Raymond Nold,²⁷ contain some of Beach's most austere chromaticism until this point. These pieces' melodic material and harmonic instability prefigure the voice she will use in her serious works of the later period.

Amy Beach's most significant contribution to sacred church music is her anthem, *Let This Mind Be in You*, op. 105, along with *The Canticle of the Sun*, op. 123, her most performed and likely most lucrative sacred choral work. Beach wrote this piece in Victorian verse anthem style. The extended opening for bass and soprano solo shows Beach at her most expressive and secure. The chromaticism is accessible yet interesting, especially in the melodic material. The raised tones in the bass solo provide the perfect combination of well-written melodic construction and creativity (mm. 1–22).

The chorus' a cappella entrance is stark and subtle. The diminished chord and the following measure's conclusion on a half-diminished chord creates an ambiguity that prepares for the piece's satisfying conclusion (mm. 52–53). The final section contains some of Beach's most characteristic compositional ideas. The chorus sings mostly in unison for the text, "and that every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." While the chorus is singing in unison, the organ deploys a dominant pedal point and thick sonorities in a sequential pattern. The result is reminiscent of the building of tension seen in the climactic portions of the Mass (m. 79). After the climax is achieved, the organ subsides. The chorus, still in unison, employs a flat sixth on the word God before allowing the piece to conclude with a luminous A-flat chord.

The energy Beach put into her sacred works, along with her busy performing schedule, must have taken their toll. Her secular choral music from this time is sparse – only five entries between 1915 and 1917. These consist mainly of small arrangements for children’s choir, which were unpublished. The aforementioned *Panama Hymn*, op. 74, was reissued as a sacred piece. “The Candy Lion” is arrangements of solo songs for female chorus, leaving *Dusk in June*, op. 82, her only original secular choral composition from the middle period.

Beach’s maturation as a composer is evident in these works from her middle period. These works contain a stylistic variety that morphed into a singular voice as she became more comfortable with her new life. This maturation subsequently flourished into some of her most substantial choral works. These works display wisdom and ingenuity while also being inspired by her new life in New York City, the church she invested herself in, and the people she would know as her closest and dearest friends.

Late Period

Beach began spending significant time in New York City in the 1920s. Her routine during touring was to split her time between the MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire and New York City. In 1930, Beach moved to New York City full time. Beach loved her constant encounters with art. She wrote to her friend Lillian Buxbaum, “The New York life never seemed more fascinating, and I never felt more enthusiasm.”²⁸ She filled her schedule with concerts, theater, and social activities. The consistent stimulation must have been overwhelming and inspiring.

Beach also became a member of St. Bartholomew’s on Park Avenue. St. Bart’s was (and still is) a grand church known for its exemplary music and fine preaching. Preaching was always important to Beach. Robert Winkworth Norwood (1874–1932), rector of St. Bart’s at the time, was a well-known theologian and author. Her attraction to him and the church is consistent with the spiritual nourishing she sought, especially after her husband’s death.²⁹

It was St. Bart’s that provided the premiere of Beach’s most well-known (at the time) choral composition, *The Canticle of the Sun*, op. 123, for chorus, SATB soloists, and an orchestra of strings, winds, four horns, two trumpets in F, and timpani, which was published and premiered in 1928 but composed several years earlier.³⁰ It is Beach’s most operatic sacred choral work. It was an immediate hit, especially with the congregation at

St. Bart's, where the work was performed annually – though with organ accompaniment, as their tradition had been for all major works. Her publisher, Arthur P. Schmidt Co., also praised the work in a letter to Beach on June 29, 1928, calling it “most effective.”³¹

The work is sectional and constructed around a four-note motive, reminiscent of a Renaissance *cambiata*, introduced as an ostinato in the bass in the first nine measures. The ostinato breaks off and then repeats itself up a third. This cell gives the work structural unity so that Beach can treat each new verse with a new texture and affect. The motive appears in the orchestration and melodic material – notably in solos and as a point of imitation over the words, “Bless ye the Lord,” throughout the work. The effect is a multi-movement cantata that is through-composed.

Beach uses choral unison to prepare sudden dramatic chords in wide textural ranges and dissonant diminished sonorities. These sudden flourishes resemble the dramatic turns seen in the opening of Haydn's *Creation*. Beach treats the chorus as a homophonic instrument, preferring to bring out the text through clear declamation and dramatic intent outside of the point of imitation at the end and other rare occurrences.

The grandness of Beach's vision often overcomes the more subtle moments of the *Canticle*. However, the work ends with a great hush on the word “humility,” showing that the text for Beach often consumed architecture. Whereas some composers would have preferred a vivacious ending to such an extroverted work and possibly reconfigured text or musical ideas to achieve this, Beach stays faithful to the requirements of the words. While the conclusion feels abrupt, one must respect Beach's authenticity and strength of ideal.

Beach's most substantial church works from this late period were written for the St. Bartholomew community, specifically her friend David McKay Williams, organist and choirmaster of the church. Block notes her attraction to Williams as a musician and person: “In church, Beach habitually sat on the left side of the sanctuary and as far back as possible so that she could watch Williams at the organ. She treasured every moment she spent with him, often recording in her diary the precise duration of their meeting or shared meal or evening of bridge and music.”³² The platonic relationship between the two was one Beach treasured, and it led her to write some of her most progressive sacred choral works.

Hearken Unto Me, op. 139, was written for the 100th anniversary of the church in 1934. In this seminal piece, Beach used an expanded version of the verse anthem form. After a dramatic organ introduction that includes a half-diminished chord on G as the first full sonority and concludes on an

E chord with an added seventh and ninth, the tenor cries “Hearken unto me!” as if he walked onto the stage at the Met. The entire composition feels like a mini opera sung in church. The chorus has a short interjection during the opening section, but the solo quartet generally dominates the piece. The chorus features more prominently at the end when they accompany the soaring soprano and tenor soloists. The range of these solos, along with the repeated triplet chords in the organ, gives the sense that we are listening to a new Amy Beach – one inspired by her surroundings: the theater; the fabulous singers at St. Bart’s, including Ruth Shaffner, soprano soloist and the person that would become her trusted confidant; and David McKay Williams, the person who would champion her music for the rest of her career.

Other works would fall into this category. “O Lord God of Israel,” op. 141, written in 1936, was one of the few works not published by Schmidt, existing only in facsimiled manuscripts in the library of St. Bart’s and at the repository located at the University of New Hampshire. *I Will Give Thanks*, op. 147, written in 1939, appears to be more conservative in style but allows for Beach’s more operatic impulses in the middle of the piece. A soprano soloist pierces the work’s texture, relegating the choir to accompaniment while the soloist, through a melodic sequence, climbs to a high C.

Beach’s last major choral composition in length and scope is *Christ in the Universe*, op. 132, written in 1932. Again dedicated to Williams, this is Beach’s most complex and modern work. The text by Alice Meynell, a British writer and suffragist, is a striking example of twentieth-century mysticism. The opening line, “with this ambiguous earth, his dealings have been told us,” handed Beach a blank canvas that she chose to paint with the most tonally ambiguous music she had written thus far. Beach does not establish a key until the chorus enters in m. 49. The key is fleeting as Beach slides back into an enchanting and progressive chromaticism that lasts throughout the work.

While rivaling the *Canticle* in length, *Christ in the Universe* is a sprawling fantasia instead of a sectional work. Material is linked together with organ interludes or additional vocal solos. Themes, though varied, are not different enough to merit the designation of a multi-movement cantata. This work is the ultimate expansion of her anthem form. The chorus, soloists, and organ are all equal partners in a lush work containing a plethora of harmonic twists and turns that would have made twentieth-century modernists quite proud. In her dissertation on Beach’s choral music, Reigles notes: “The entire first 32 bars remind the listener Dr. William T. Allen³³ of

Debussy and Scriabin, the latter perhaps because of the piano patterns. According to Dr. Allen, ‘we are still in tertian structure, and hanging on to tonality by our teeth,’ by means of the implied leadings of dominant harmony.”³⁴ Outside of its premiere on April 17, 1932, performances of this piece are undocumented.³⁵ The intense chromaticism may be a factor, but the work shows Beach at her most creative and harmonically extravagant.

Conclusion

Amy Beach’s choral music makes up a significant portion of her output. The Grand Mass still endures as her most substantial composition – an amazing accomplishment for a young composer. Beach’s church music explores a wide array of styles, from traditional Anglican church music to mini cantatas that bring operatic style to the Episcopal Mass. Her secular choral music includes significant contributions to women’s choir repertoire. Her harmonic language progresses from Victorian uses of augmented leading tones and suspension to modernist deployments of ambiguous tonality. Her love of art song informs her use of the solo vocal line and the organ as an equal partner in the works’ textures. Amy Beach’s reemergence will only benefit from a continued and thorough examination of her as one of America’s most important composers of sacred choral music.

Notes

1. Chester L. Alwes, “Choral Music in the Culture of the Nineteenth Century,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Choral Music*, ed. Andre de Quadros (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 29.
2. Adrienne Fried Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 146.
3. Letter to A. P. Schmidt Company, April 10, 1907, box 303, folder 5, A. P. Schmidt Company Archives, Music Division, Library of Congress.
4. Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 257–58.
5. Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 297.
6. Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 164.
7. Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 8.
8. Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 325n3.
9. B. Jean Reigles, “The Choral Music of Amy Beach” (PhD diss., Texas Tech University, 1996), p. 9.
10. Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 178.

11. Found in the commemorative program for St. Bartholomew's centennial celebration: January 13–20, 1935. Other pieces by Amy Beach performed as part of the centennial celebration include *Cantate Domino* and an excerpt from *The Canticle of the Sun*.
12. Reigles, "The Choral Music," 12.
13. Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 296–97.
14. Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 62.
15. The composer Constance Runcie (1836–1911) may have had a premiere in Missouri in the middle of the nineteenth century that would put this assertion in jeopardy; however, the performance is undocumented.
16. Quoted in Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 71.
17. Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 71.
18. Amy Beach, *Grand Mass in E-flat Major*, op. 5, ed. Matthew Phelps (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2018).
19. Mrs. H. H. A. Beach, "Why I Chose my Profession," *Mother's Magazine* 9, no. 2 (February 1914): 7–8.
20. *Chicago Tribune*, quoted in Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 82.
21. Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 80.
22. Quoted in Reigles, "The Choral Music," 141.
23. The title page of the work spells the adapter of the text "Banckroft." The 1900 Federal Census records from Boston include two persons named "Frederick Bancroft": a 29-year-old postal clerk and a 44-year-old musician. The latter is presumably Beach's collaborator.
24. Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 169.
25. Quoted in Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 168.
26. Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 179.
27. Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 250.
28. Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 233.
29. Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 257.
30. See Block, pp. 363n38 and 39, on the date of composition.
31. Letter from A. P. Schmidt Company, June 29, 1928, box 303, folder 16, A. P. Schmidt Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington.
32. Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 258.
33. William T. Allen (1926–2016) was a noted organist and writer on music.
34. Quoted in Reigles, "The Choral Music," 126.
35. Special thanks to my friend Paolo Bordignon for finding the premiere date in the archives of St. Bartholomew.