

A GENDER AND RECEPTION-INFORMED ANALYSIS OF AMY BEACH'S PIANO
CONCERTO, OP. 45

by

ANDREW CANNESTRA

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“A Gender and Reception-Informed Analysis of Amy Beach’s Piano Concerto, Op. 45”, a lecture-document prepared by Andrew Cannestra in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in the School of Music and Dance. This lecture-document has been approved and accepted by:

Dr. Alexandre Dossin, Chair of the Examining Committee

Date

Committee in Charge:	Dr. Alexandre Dossin, Chair
	Dr. Ryan Light, Institutional Representative
	Dr. Brian Hsu
	Dr. Stephen Rodgers

Accepted by:

Leslie Straka, D.M.A.
Director of Graduate Studies, School of Music and Dance

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CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Andrew Canestra

PLACE OF BIRTH: Waukesha, Wisconsin, United States

DATE OF BIRTH: March 2nd, 1999

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon
Roosevelt University
Saint Olaf College

DEGREES AWARDED:

Doctor of Musical Arts in Piano Performance, 2026, University of Oregon
Master of Music in Piano Performance, 2022, Roosevelt University
Bachelor of Music in Piano Performance, 2020, Saint Olaf College

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Romantic-Era Music by Under-represented Composers

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Visiting Instructor of Music, Saint Olaf College, 2025-present

Graduate Employee, University of Oregon, 2022-2025

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I. Introduction

Amy Beach's Piano Concerto in C-sharp minor, Op. 45, would certainly have found its place among the standard concerto repertoire had it not been written by a woman in 1900. It features all of the elements of the most popular Romantic-era piano concerti: a grandiose symphonic conception, attractive and memorable melodies, virtuosic pianism, and lush orchestral moments. A 1994 review from the Baltimore Sun notes that this concerto "might become extremely popular if enough people get a chance to hear it."¹ Nevertheless, according to current research consensus, aside from two notable exceptions, Beach was the only pianist to perform the work between its 1900 premiere and the 1970s, decades after her death. Furthermore, pianist Teresa Carreño, the work's dedicatee, never performed the work despite expressing written interest². This document will study how critical reviews to Beach's concerto have evolved over time through an understanding of which specific elements of her concerto speak to both evidence of the concerto's quality and sources of early critical malign.

Historically, and particularly before 1900, the piano concerto was a male-dominated genre. Emerging from the baroque concerto grosso, the piano concerto truly established itself during the Classical era with the concerti of Mozart (27) and Beethoven (5), whose works shaped nearly every standard work that came afterwards. As the 19th century progressed, other canonical composers contributing to the genre included Chopin (2), Mendelssohn (2), Liszt (2 + the single-movement Totentanz and Fantasy on Hungarian Themes), Brahms (2), Robert Schumann, Grieg, Saint-Saëns (5), and Tchaikovsky (3). As a virtuosic pianist herself, by the

¹ Baltimore Sun, "Beach's piano concerto will take center stage", October 7th, 1994, <https://www.baltimoresun.com/1994/10/07/beachs-piano-concerto-will-take-center-stage-2/>

² Rushing, "Amy Beach's Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in C-Sharp Minor, Op. 45: A Historical, Stylistic, and Analytical Study", p. 20

time Beach wrote this concerto, she had performed Chopin's Concerto no. 2 in F minor and Ignaz Moscheles' Concerto no. 3 in G minor with the Boston Symphony, and she wrote her own cadenza for Beethoven's Concerto no. 3 in C minor, implying intimate familiarity there, too³.

This document will explore the early performance and reception history of Beach's Piano Concerto in order to understand and contextualize critical reactions to these initial performances. My analysis of the concerto translates the vernacular language of these music critics into a music theory-informed analysis, highlighting elements and moments from this concerto that consistently appeared in these critical reviews. The coming paragraphs will investigate these claims made by reviewers, focusing particularly on one particular comprehensive review by Philip Hale but incorporating the work of others. This language written for a general audience will, in turn, become applied towards the analytical tools of music theory. I also incorporate the work of 20th-century feminist and civil rights activist Audre Lorde, posing broader questions about the need to compare the work of Beach with her male colleagues in order to evaluate her work.

³ Yang, *An Analytical Study of the Piano Concerto in C-sharp minor, Op. 45, by Amy Beach*, p. 22-23

II: Biography & Historical Context

Amy Marcy Cheney was born on September 5th, 1867 to a wealthy family in Henniker, New Hampshire⁴. From an early age, she demonstrated a special talent for music; her mother, Clara Cheney, recalled that Amy “could hum forty tunes correctly and exactly as she heard them”⁵. She began improvising at the age of two, wrote her first piano pieces at the age of four, and began taking piano lessons from her mother at the age of six, going on to give her first public performance the following year⁶. At the age of sixteen, she made her orchestral debut with the Boston Symphony, playing Ignaz Moscheles’ G minor concerto to overwhelmingly positive critical reviews⁷. In spite of these accomplishments, her family strongly opposed her pursuing a career as a professional touring concert pianist, believing it to not be a suitable role for her in society, and rejected several offers from concert managers on her behalf.⁸

Upon turning eighteen, at the behest of her family, she married Henry Harris Aubrey Beach, a wealthy doctor⁹. Henry was twenty-five years older, and scholars have generally speculated that while this was not officially an arranged marriage, Amy’s mother likely played a major role. This decision proved to be a double-edged sword: as part of their marriage agreement, Beach was to perform in public no more than once per year, and was not to earn any money from

⁴ Bomberger, *The Cambridge Companion to Amy Beach*, p. xx

⁵ Block, “A ‘Veritable Autobiography’? Amy Beach’s Piano Concerto in C-Sharp Minor, op. 45”, p. 397

⁶ Block, p. 398-399

⁷ Block, p. 399

⁸ Block, p. 397-398

⁹ Block, p. 400

any performances¹⁰. However, this allowed her a considerable amount of time to compose without the pressures of providing for the family or sustaining an active career as a concert pianist. Furthermore, she and Henry never had any children, and he actively encouraged her to compose. These factors set Beach apart from other prominent 19th-century female composers, such as Clara Wieck Schumann, who infamously embarked on a busy career as a concert pianist whilst having eight children, limiting her time to compose¹¹. Beach also benefited from her location in the heart of Boston, the center of American classical music at the time, as well as the social circles she frequented while living there. When considering the myriad roadblocks along women's path to recognition as a serious composer in the 19th century, one must acknowledge Beach's privileged circumstances in addition to her talent, even accounting for her husband's restrictions on her public performances. Nevertheless, in referring to this period of her life, Adrienne Fried Block states that "[Beach's] life as a composer was bought at the cost of her preferred life as a performer".¹²

Henry Beach passed away in 1910, which proved to be a blessing in disguise. While she was devastated by her husband's loss after some 25 years of marriage, this also meant the end of their restrictive agreement on public performances¹³. She would go on to tour around the country and even to Europe throughout the 1910s, catapulting her into the forefront of the American classical music scene and solidifying her reputation as a widely respected pianist and composer.

¹⁰ Block, p. 400

¹¹ Reich, *Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman*, p. 137

¹² Block, p. 397

¹³ Bomberger, p. 192

During her lifetime, critics were considerably more effusive when praising her pianism than her compositions. One critic, in particular, said that she played “the piano like a man”; Beach was apparently so taken by this comment that she immediately ordered 25 copies of the review, as she must have considered this quite the compliment.¹⁴

Her pianism heavily shaped her composition, from myriad solo piano works to chamber music and art song. At the time, these genres were considered more suitable for a woman composer, belonging more to the salon style than the concert stage; however, unlike many of her female contemporaries, she did not limit herself to these more intimate forms. In the 1890s, she began work on several large-scale projects: her Mass in E-flat major, premiered in 1892; her “Gaelic” Symphony, which the Boston Symphony premiered in 1896, and was the first symphony composed and published by an American woman; and her piano concerto, to be premiered in 1900 with the Boston Symphony, featuring the composer as the piano soloist. While analyzing critical reception of her symphony would constitute a project similar in scale to this document, one can still glean from a cursory overview that these reviews focused more on Beach’s gender than anything else¹⁵. Nevertheless, the occasion must have been enough of a success to convince the Boston Symphony to program her piano concerto four years later.

Beach premiered the work at the piano with the Boston Symphony on April 7th, 1900. One can only imagine how cathartic this performance was for her, both as composer and pianist. As Block eloquently states: “The piano concerto, a full-blown late romantic work for virtuoso

¹⁴ Rushing, p. 26-27

¹⁵ Bomberger, p. 167-170

pianist and large orchestra, was her bid to return to the stage that she so missed”¹⁶. Indeed, it represented her first concerto performance since her teenage years and before her marriage. From all accounts, the concert was well-attended and the audience enthusiastic. The occasion drew a wide gathering of critics from Boston’s print media establishments: *Boston Courier*, *Boston Daily Advertiser*, *Boston Gazette*, *Boston Globe*, *Boston Herald*, *Boston Traveler*, *Boston Journal*, and *Boston Transcript*. Whatever shred of openness to hearing a woman’s work these reviewers demonstrated while reviewing the “Gaelic” Symphony all but disappeared, and these comments will become thoroughly unpacked in my analysis of the concerto.

Aside from a single two-piano performance in 1909, Beach did not perform the work between the premiere and her 1913 tour of Germany. Before her husband’s death in 1910, this can be partially explained by her marriage’s performance agreement limiting her to once per year, but the premiere’s harsh critical reviews likely played a part in discouraging orchestras to consider programming the concerto. Fortunately for Beach, these later performances were far more successful, garnering warmer reactions from critics and bolstering her reputation back in the United States. Upon return to America, she performed this work in the following cities: San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, St. Louis, Boston, and St. Paul¹⁷. These performances and their corresponding critical reviews will be referenced in the analysis, and a complete listing can be found in Appendices A (performances) and D (reviews). Only two other pianists besides Beach performed the work within her lifetime: Dagmar de Corval Ruebner (1911) and Helen Pugh

¹⁶ Block, p. 400

¹⁷ Rushing, p. 21

(1923)¹⁸. Scholarly consensus indicates that these two pianists only performed the work once; Pugh's represents the last known performance for over fifty years.

The first pianists in modern times to revive the work were Virginia Eskin (1975) and Mary Louise Boehm (1976). Scholars have largely pinpointed Boehm's as the first performance, but recent research has uncovered Eskin's 1975 performance in San Francisco as the modern premiere. Boehm discovered the work in the library of the Free Library of Philadelphia,¹⁹ first performing the concerto in April 1976 with the American Symphony Orchestra, and created the first-ever commercial recording the following month with the Westphalian Symphony Orchestra²⁰. Boehm herself noted the significance of the moment in history, as 1975 had been declared the "Women's Year" by the United Nations, prompting further interest within the classical music world in women composers²¹. This recording did not ensure imminent success, as the concerto received no more commercial recordings for over two decades.

In the 1980s and 1990s, some more adventurous orchestras programmed the concerto, many of whom performed with Eskin. Of her multitude of performances, a non-commercial recording can only be found of her 1989 performance with the Utah Symphony, but records indicate she also performed the work with the Rochester, San Francisco, Rochester, and Annapolis Symphony. New recordings were finally created by Joanne Polk and the English Chamber Orchestra (1999) and Alan Feinberg and the Nashville Symphony Orchestra (2003) to favorable reviews, increasing the work's visibility and accessibility. Polk, in particular, became

¹⁸ Rushing, p. 28

¹⁹ Rushing, p. 29

²⁰ Macdonald, 53

²¹ Kathie Beals, *The Standard-Star*, July 9th, 1976, p. 31

the first pianist to record the complete piano works of Beach, dedicating her career to the revival of Beach's music²². Beyond musical merit, Feinberg's recording is also noteworthy for a different reason: he was the first male pianist to perform and record the Beach concerto. Given an industry still dominated by men to this day, female composers having worthy advocates from multiple genders legitimizes their accomplishments, bringing works like Beach's concerto beyond the "women composers" niche. This heightened visibility around the turn of the century spurred a bevy of scholarly work, bringing important academic recognition alongside increased publicity with musicians and the general public.

Beach's concerto has received more public performances within the past twenty or so years than the entirety of the 20th century, including many by collegiate and community orchestras, indicating the concerto's broader appeal and increasing accessibility. Nevertheless, to this day, Beach's concerto remains off the beaten path relative to other Romantic-era concerti, and major orchestras' continued reluctance to program or record the work comes as no surprise amongst their overall resistance to performing works by women composers. David Hurwitz, one of today's most prominent classical music critics, argues on behalf of performing Beach's concerto more frequently, stating that Beach's concerto "is a first-class piece of writing... It's got wonderful tunes, has a delightful scherzo, a lovely slow movement. The tunes are first-class, the orchestration is delightful, and the piano writing is delicious."²³ Given a few more advocates in positions of power, one can envision this work emerging into its well-deserved place in the canon.

²² Rushing, p. 64

²³ Hurwitz, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s5BoDRPBHwI>, 2:30-3:10. Accessed January 8th, 2026.

III. Literature Review: Scholarship on Beach's Piano Concerto

E. Lindsey Merrill's 1963 dissertation is the first scholarly document to focus solely on Beach herself. His research represents a window into the mostly empty transitory zone between Beach's lifetime - of which there are many records - and modern-era scholarship. Merrill's work focuses more on biography than analysis and devotes little bandwidth to the piano concerto, but given that the piano concerto was never performed between Beach's lifetime and the 1970s, Merrill offers a glimpse into how her music was perceived during this middleground. This document is a product of its time, using dated misogynistic language that dismisses her artistry. For example, he states: "While freely admitting that Mrs. Beach was no innovator, one must acknowledge the complete sincerity of her efforts."²⁴ He also introduces the composer in the first sentence of his preface as "Mrs. Henry Harris Aubrey Beach," as it was customary to refer to women in society as their husband's wife²⁵. Furthermore, his conclusions are often incorrect, such as his assertion that "rondo form does not exist in the works of Mrs. Beach"²⁶; an analysis of this piano concerto alone disproves this statement, as the fourth movement does indeed follow rondo form. Callous errors notwithstanding, rather than choosing to ignore this document, including Merrill's work illuminates this gray area in the reception of Beach's music after her death but before her contemporary revival, and Merrill's writing does form an important - if flawed - contribution towards scholarship of her life and music.

²⁴ Merrill, p. iv

²⁵ Merrill, p. ii

²⁶ Merrill, p. 288

Coincidentally, two important articles relating to the concerto's genesis, premiere, and reception were published in consecutive years: Claudia Macdonald's comparison of the reception of Beach's concerto and Clara Schumann's piano concerto (1993) and Adrienne Fried Block's argument that this concerto can be thought of as autobiographical (1994). Both focus on the composer's gender and how it affected the expectations of critics and audiences alike, albeit in different ways, and Macdonald in particular provides an essential basis for my work, synthesizing critical reception with analysis. Macdonald's article was the first to argue that gender bias likely played a role in early critical review²⁷, providing an important foundation for the analytical work in this document. She also breaks ground by uncovering critical reviews, particularly focusing on the eight that Beach saved from the April 7, 1900 premiere of this concerto.²⁸ Block's article, which later became integrated into her landmark biography on Beach, is more biographical and analytical in nature and does not mention or quote any specific critical reviews.

To date, three dissertations have been published that focus primarily on Beach's piano concerto. In another remarkable coincidence, the first two were published one year apart as well, and both bill themselves as, among other things, "analytical studies"²⁹. Ching-Lan Yang (1999) broke ground on a music-theory-based analysis of the concerto, leaning on historical context when necessary. Katrina Carlson Rushing (2000) devotes more time to Beach's life and other works, but still primarily focuses on the music itself. However, she does quote some newspaper

²⁷ Macdonald, *Critical Reception and the Woman Composer*, p. 55

²⁸ Macdonald, p. 43

²⁹ Yang and Rushing, title pages

clippings from the time to describe the piece's initial critical reception, forming an excellent starting point for locating primary sources. Monica Schultz Baker (2018) most recently compared Beach's concerto Edward MacDowell's Piano Concerto No. 2, which was premiered shortly before Beach's (1889) to rave reviews and is regarded as one of the foremost 19th-century American piano concerti³⁰. Of particular interest, Baker devotes a short section to "Performance and Reception History of Beach's Concerto". While brief, her findings open the door to further studies of this topic.

In modern times, there have been two significant biographies published on Beach's life and work: one by the aforementioned Adrienne Fried Block (1998)³¹ and another by E. Douglas Bomberger (2023)³². Block's comprehensive biography synthesizes findings from her career spent largely studying Beach's music, and every contemporary Beach scholar is indebted to her work. Bomberger's more recent biography incorporates contemporary scholarship on Beach's life and work, focusing on individual genres of music by chapter rather than a chronological narrative. He does dedicate a significant portion of his chapter on Beach's orchestral literature to the concerto, and his findings and conclusions largely mirror those in these dissertations and articles.

Today, the Women's Philharmonic Advocacy serves as the center of Beach history and scholarship, promoting performances, recordings, and new scholarship relating to her works. The organization was formed in 2008, taking up the mission of the now-defunct Women's

³⁰ Baker, p. 13

³¹ Block, Amy Beach, *Passionate Victorian*, title page

³² Bomberger,

Philharmonic, an orchestra dedicated to performing works by women composers, and responsible for the concerto performance by Joanne Polk in 2000. They helped to organize a joint Amy Beach-Teresa Carreño conference in 2017; this conference featured a lecture by the aforementioned biographer E. Douglas Bomberger titled “Rewriting Dvořák: A New Interpretation of the Beach Piano Concerto”³³. This organization also maintains Beach’s official website, www.amybeach.org.

Lastly, this document draws heavily upon primary sources, particularly newspaper clippings and reviews from Beach’s known performances of the concerto beyond those already referenced in existing literature. While other scholars have uncovered and cited many such reviews, this document contains others not yet published in Beach scholarship; see Appendix D for the complete chronological listing. This document strives to produce the most comprehensive gathering of the sources to date, and asserts that the sample size of these findings is sufficient to draw the necessary conclusions.

Most existing literature on this concerto focuses primarily on music theory or purely biographical information, with little synthesis of the two. Yang’s dissertation provides a thorough and detailed analysis covering every measure of the work, while Rushing’s work emphasizes both history and theory equally, but keeps their conclusions separate. Baker’s analysis offers a side-by-side with MacDowell’s Concerto No. 2, providing important context for the expected form of a piano concerto at the time, but stops short of synthesizing this analysis with critical reactions to both concerti. This document accomplishes this synthesis by taking these primary sources as a starting point, including those not yet quoted and written about, particularly

³³ <https://www.amybeach.org/about/2017-unh-beach-carreno-conference/>

newspaper clippings from the time when Beach herself performed the work in the 1900s and 1910s. Similarly, while other authors have acknowledged the role Beach's gender played in the work's reception and performance history, none have connected this with the feminist writings of Audre Lorde and the concept of the mythical norm within the context of the piano concerto. This synthesis of reception history, music theory, and gender theory presents a fresh perspective on Beach's concerto, holistically framing its status in the canon. Lastly, as part of my research, I have catalogued every performance with piano and orchestra to date of this concert - the first such resource to date. It is my hope that others will continue to add to this growing registry of performances in the coming years.

IV. Analysis & Reception

Given that reviewers most frequently reference the first movement's form, and given that this first movement represents more than half of the concerto by total length, this analysis will primarily focus on the first movement, using analytical tools to help the modern-day listener understand and experience the concerto from the perspective of an audience member or critic in 1900. In particular, this analysis focuses on two main musical parameters: form (particularly through the lens of prolongation and closure) and orchestration. These parameters appear most frequently in early critical reviews and, as such, will be addressed in detail. My final conclusions draw on both my analysis and primary source findings.

Beach's concerto was given its world premiere in April 1900 with the Boston Symphony, featuring the composer herself at the keyboard. While most reviews were tepid at best, one in particular stands out from Philip Hale (critic of the *Boston Journal*):

The concerto was a disappointment in nearly every way. The structure was large, pretentious; there was an overabundance of outside ornamentation, but the interior was bare and commonplace, and there is a well-defined suspicion that the foundations and walls were not substantial. The themes were not distinguished; the development was too often vague and rambling; the moods, when there were moods, were those of other composers; thus the mood of the opening [part] of the slow movement was palpably Wagnerian. The first movement was long drawn out, and when there was the thought of the end, there was a curiously unexpected and meaningless appendix. The scherzo was harmonically monotonous, and the finale—not one measure now remains in the memory. The orchestration was crude and necessarily ineffective.³⁴

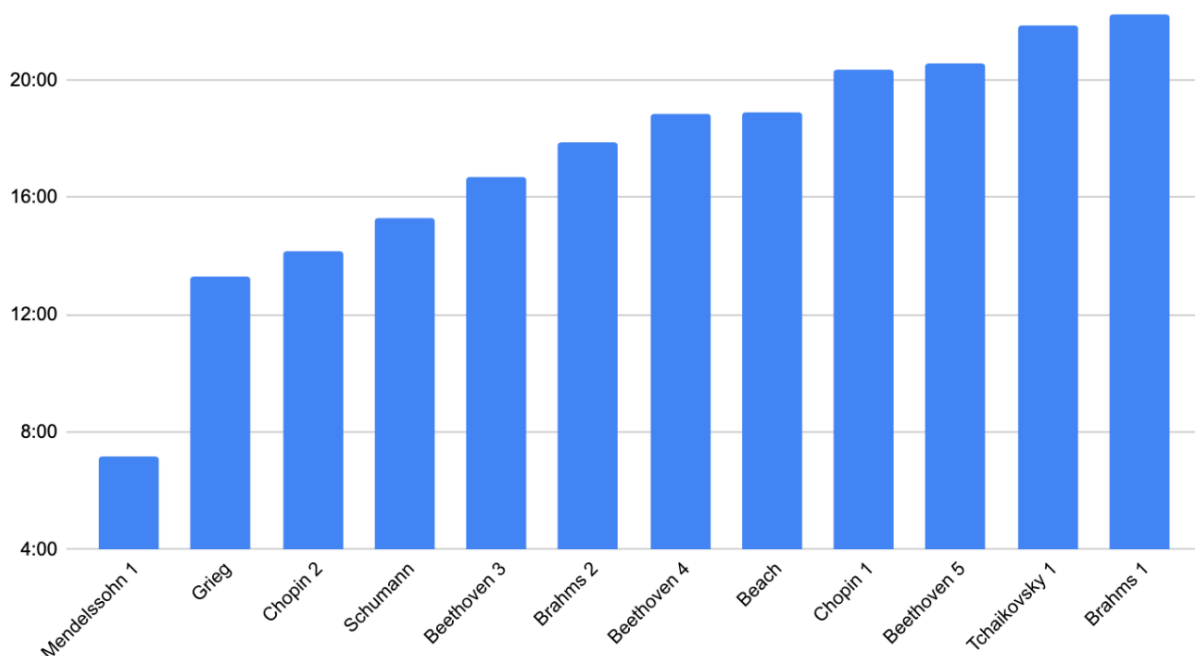
The coming paragraphs will investigate these claims made by Hale in the context of Beach's first movement, breaking down his language written for a general audience, applying it towards more technical analytical tools, and comparing it with other 19th-century piano concerto first movements, when appropriate. As will soon become clear, many of the traits critics praised

³⁴ Hale, Philip. "Symphony Night." *Boston Journal*, n.d.

other composers for have been twisted by gender bias to become epithets against Beach's composition. For a complete listing of critical reviews from this premiere, consult Appendix D; I chose to focus on Hale's review as a representative sample due to its all-encompassing nature, as his writing synthesizes elements that appear in other contemporaneous reviews.

First, one must address the issue of structure. To a pessimistic listener, "large" and "pretentious" could easily describe the overwhelming majority of the classical music canon; nevertheless, this claim can be objectively addressed through an objective comparison to first movements from other Romantic-era piano concerti. Beach's first movement is by far the longest of the four, with most performances clocking around 20 minutes; one cannot dispute the word "large" to describe it. I have graphed the average length Beach's first movement alongside some canonical works from the 19th century, works that a music critic such as Hale likely knew. Each length averages six representative recordings of each work; see appendix for a granular list of each recording referenced in this table.

Figure 1: Average 19th-century Piano Concerto 1st Movement Lengths (in minutes)



Beach's first movement is by no means an outlier in its length; furthermore, some of the most celebrated and widely performed piano concerti - particularly the first concerti of both Brahms and Tchaikovsky - are substantially longer. Clearly, length alone does not explain Hale's criticism. To address the broader structural critique - which Hale may have perceived as "pretentious" - requires in-depth analysis, as well as incorporating his other claims, particularly his "well-defined suspicion that the foundations and walls were not substantial". Hale most likely took issue with some of the ways in which Beach subverts elements of traditional first-movement sonata form in the 19th-century piano concerto. The following paragraphs will illustrate how these foundations, the very structure of the concerto, are, in fact, incredibly well-defined, balanced between formal innovation and adhering to tradition. From here onwards, all analysis presented - both of Beach's concerto and comparisons to other 19th-century piano concerti - is my own, as I analyze parameters of the work not often addressed in previous analyses and do so in targeted ways, rather than to provide a thorough technical description of the complete work. This analytical work seeks to both understand the work within the framework and context of the standard 19th-century piano concerto as a music critic would have understood it at the time and come to understand how Beach's form and musical language holds together on its own merits.

Most piano concerti composed before 1900 begin with a substantial orchestral introduction, often presenting most of the main themes of the rest of the movement in a "double exposition"³⁵. Exceptions to the rule include the Robert Schumann Concerto, the Grieg Concerto, Brahms Concerto No. 2, and Tchaikovsky Concerto No. 1 - all beloved works entrenched in the canon. While none of these adhere strictly to concerto double-exposition sonata-form structural

³⁵ Schmidt-Beste, *The Sonata*, p. 9-10

norms, critics have lauded their innovation rather than complaining about the structure being wrong or out of order. Beach's concerto opens with a hybrid of sorts: 35 measures of orchestral introduction, developing the primary theme alongside some transitional material, only to be interrupted by the soloist's bold virtuosic entrance in m. 35 that leads to a mini-cadenza. While Beach does subvert expectations here, several other 19th-century concerti also provide a cadenza as the pianist's first entrance: Beethoven (No. 5), Tchaikovsky (No. 1), and Grieg all provide the pianist with cadenzas of varying lengths. Notably, even after the orchestra re-enters, Beach does not yet provide a cadence or real moment of closure, having provided a deceptive cadence in m. 29, a prolonged augmented sixth chord in the orchestra from mm. 30-35, and a prolonged dominant from the piano entrance in m. 35. It makes sense, then, that the introduction of a new theme in m. 69 coincides with the first PAC of the movement, reinforcing the structural beams of the movement rather than obscuring them.

In the second theme area, Beach similarly subverts the traditional structural expectations. Traditionally, the secondary theme of a sonata form in a minor key takes place in the relative major, but Beach instead modulates to A major, the submediant. This choice is unusual, but not unprecedented, having been used in grandiose first movement sonata forms in the minor mode by Beethoven (Symphony No. 9), Brahms (Piano Quintet), and Schubert (Unfinished Symphony)³⁶. Beyond the question of precedent, one could also explain Beach's preference for A major as a choice of key through her use of modulation by thirds elsewhere in the work, particularly through her penchant for augmented sixth chords in moments of transition and expected closure, making this particular modulation even more logical through a more generative

³⁶ Rushing, p. 46

approach to form. In fact, rather than providing a half-cadence on the dominant of the new key to announce its impending arrival, Beach lingers on another augmented sixth chord of this new key from mm. 127-131, setting up the solo piano entry with this second theme in m. 132.

Furthermore, Beach returns to the key of A major in her second movement, so perhaps this key choice also serves to prepare the listener's ear for the Scherzo.

Throughout this secondary key area, she does not provide a PAC in this new key, lingering on the dominant pedal tone mm. 160-165 but never resolving. Despite these subversions, this second theme area checks the other boxes: a brand-new theme in a nearby major key that contrasts the primary theme with its resplendent lyricism. Furthermore, in piano concerto first movements, secondary themes typically feature thinner orchestration, often allowing the pianist to state the second theme alone, increasing in intensity and forces before either resolving on a cadence or leading directly to the development. Beach accomplishes all of these things: introducing the theme with solo piano, followed by a solo violin over sparing orchestration, and only later soaring with the strength of the full orchestra. Clearly, she only diverges from tradition in her choice of key and avoidance of authentic cadences to demarcate boundaries. Another quick comparison with other 19th-century minor-mode piano concerti illustrates that her decision does not come without precedent: the secondary theme in Tchaikovsky's Concerto No. 1, for example, takes place in A-flat major, the subtonic of the home key of B-flat minor rather than the more standard D-flat major, and he transitions into this key through a minor seventh pivot chord far less clear in its direction and function than Beach's augmented sixth.

The development section begins in m. 166 with a shockingly distant syncopated D half-diminished seventh chord. Again, while this can be seen as obscuring the structure by abruptly modulating to a distant key to signal the start of the development, it's hardly an unprecedented formal choice. To once again compare with Tchaikovsky No. 1, the second theme area never truly cadences in A-flat major, instead modulating to C minor and wandering into the development with little advance warning. Beach still uses rhetoric and sudden contrast in key and texture to delineate this formal boundary, even without a rigorous definition of cadence and closure. Again, this choice is consistent with how she approaches transitions elsewhere in the work, most notably the pianist's dramatic first entrance and the recently discussed transition into the second theme area.

In sonata form, developments have one main purpose that can be accomplished in many different ways: developing already-introduced themes while heightening tension and turmoil, setting the stage for the recapitulation's resolution of the so-called sonata problem. Hale describes this development as "too often vague and rambling"; unfortunately for Hale, developments by their definition must ramble in order to explore new key areas, develop previous themes in novel ways, and heighten tension to prepare for the recapitulation. Furthermore, her approach to form and harmonic language within this development is consistent with the rest of the movement up until this point, as she develops both the first and second themes³⁷, modulates by augmented sixth, avoids cadences, and prolongs closure. The first PAC arrives in the key of G-sharp minor (V of the original tonic key) in m. 192, coming at the end of a cadenza-like virtuosic passage from mm. 181-191 that mirrors the opening cadenza. The

³⁷ See Figure 7 for a full breakdown of theme categorization by measure number.

orchestra subsequently enters with the boldest statement yet of the primary theme from the beginning of the movement; if this were in the home key, it would surely signal the start of the recapitulation. Again, Beach is hardly the first to create a false recapitulation in the “wrong” key, particularly this early in the movement; besides, a 26-measure development would seem rather short when compared to the expansive exposition. The coming sixty bars or so are among the most dramatic and powerful of the movement, restating the beginning of the development with even more tumultuous harmonies. The harmonic unrest eventually comes to a standstill in m. 267, as another extended stay on an augmented sixth chord from mm. 259-266 leads to a re-statement of the second theme, this time in F minor - another third relationship to the home key of C-sharp.

This second theme statement gains momentum and winds its way to the dominant of our long-promised home key, leading to a bold, rhetorically strong statement of the primary theme in C-sharp minor in m. 286. By the logic of a more traditional model of piano concerto form, there should be a clear arrival on the tonic chord in the homey key at this moment, and Beach builds these expectations by lingering on the dominant from mm. 278-285 amidst a simultaneous *accelerando* and *crescendo*. However, she instead substitutes a second-inversion F-sharp minor chord - iv instead of i - subverting syntactical expectations once more while delivering a rhetorically strong moment of arrival. Given Beach’s habitual avoidance of expected closure in this movement so far, this decision is both logical and consistent with her harmonic language. From here, the recapitulation is truncated compared to the exposition, with the secondary theme arriving in D-flat major at m. 304 (after another augmented sixth chord, of course) and the long-awaited and much-anticipated PAC in the major equivalent of the home key in m. 340.

Traditionally, concerto first movements feature a cadenza between the end of the recapitulation and the orchestral coda, landing on a cadential 6/4 chord and beginning with a trill in the piano part. Hale takes issue with this ending section of the movement in particular: “when there was the thought of the end, there was a curiously unexpected and meaningless appendix”. Despite this comment, the cadenza and subsequent coda themselves do not stand out as being unnecessarily lengthy or out-of-place relative to the rest of the movement. As she does earlier in the movement, Beach builds expectations for these traditional moments of structure and delivers on rhetoric, but not syntax; this transition to the cadenza proves to be more of the same. She works the piano up to a trill on the tonic, but harmonized by a deceptive cadence VI chord instead before launching into the cadenza. Only at the end of this cadenza, when the orchestra comes back in m. 397, does she land on this much-anticipated cadential 6/4.

From here to the end of the movement, the music intensifies in texture and circles closer and closer around the tonic. She avoids opportunities for cadences in m. 418, m. 424, and m. 428, finally leading to a plagal cadence into m. 433 and an exclamation point on the tonic from mm. 433-439, the end of the movement. Perhaps this lack of traditional authentic cadences where they were most expected caused Philip Hale to lament the lack of structure or direction at the end of the movement, even amongst a late Romantic harmonic language that increasingly de-centered the importance of these cadences. Instead, Beach’s first movement creates a highly dramatic first movement ambitious in scope that still adheres to many of the norms of sonata form, even taking into account its structural and harmonic innovations. These moments - such as m. 433, where a listener expects an authentic cadence, but instead hears a plagal cadence - highlight and punctuate structural clarity within Beach’s language, accompanied by rhetoric to

match. Rather than constituting a “meaningless appendix”, Beach’s first movement holds together not in spite of its avoidance of cadential closure and unusual harmonies, but because of it.

Having addressed Hale’s criticism of the first movement’s structure, one must next address his description of the musical material itself: “the themes were not distinguished; ... the moods, when there were moods, were those of other composers”. In order to address this claim, we must first identify and label Beach’s significant themes of this movement. Besides the primary and secondary theme, Beach uses a third theme as transitional material; these three themes are defined and pictured below.

Figure 2: Primary Theme, mm. 1-4



Figure 3: Horn Fifths Theme, layered with Primary Theme, mm. 69-72

Figure 4: Secondary Theme (excerpt), mm. 132-137



The primary theme, as introduced in mm. 1-4, consists mainly of stepwise motion and most frequently (though not always) occurs in the minor mode; it also features elements of pentatonicism in m. 3-4, reflecting a synthesis of American folk tradition with European structure and form. The horn fifths theme is more rhythmic in nature, often layered with the primary theme but later appearing on its own. Lastly, the secondary theme is the most melodic of the three and least motivic, though it does consist of similar rhythmic patterns corresponding to falling and rising leaps. Interestingly, Beach adapts this theme from her early art song “Jeune fille et jeune fleur”, op. 1 no. 3, which translates to “young girl and young flower”³⁸. This quotation from one of her earliest published compositions implies an evocation of nostalgia and innocence, emotions conventionally belonging to the second theme within sonata form. These

³⁸ Yang, p. 46.

themes, clearly, are distinct from one another, and generally behave as themes should in sonata theory.

Beach introduces and develops these themes in a Germanic way, using fragmentation, sequencing, inversion, augmentation, and diminution of short rhythmic and motivic cells not only to develop, but to achieve a Lisztian thematic transformation³⁹.

Figure 5: Fragmentation & Sequencing of Primary Theme (Piano, mm. 56-59), Inversion (Horn, mm. 54-56)



Figure 6: Augmentation of Horn Fifths Theme, mm. 436-440



However, her characteristic avoidance of cadence and lack of reliance on symmetrical phrase structures is notably less Germanic. This combination may have perplexed Hale, who perhaps was unable to trace her motivic development without such clear landmarks. However, a detailed cataloguing of the movement by theme clearly showcases her economy of material and delineation of each individual section as belonging to one of these three themes. Figure 7 (below) shows a theme table of the movement, highlighting which themes are used where:

M. 1-35: Primary Theme
 M. 36-42: virtuosic pianism
 M. 43-68: Primary Theme
 M. 69-86: horn fifths theme, layered with primary theme
 M. 87-99: Primary Theme
 M. 100-114: transitional theme
 M. 115-119: Primary Theme
 M. 120-127: virtuosic pianism
 M. 128-131: Primary Theme
 M. 132-165: Secondary Theme
 M. 166-173: horn fifths Theme
 M. 174-181: Primary Theme
 M. 182-191: virtuosic pianism
 M. 192-200: Primary Theme
 M. 201-210: Secondary Theme
 M. 211-214: transitional theme
 M. 215-247: horn fifths Theme
 M. 248-251: Primary Theme
 M. 252-256: virtuosic pianism
 M. 257: Primary Theme
 M. 258: virtuosic pianism
 M. 259-266: primary theme
 M. 267-277: secondary theme
 M. 278-285: virtuosic pianism + primary theme
 M. 286-303: Primary Theme
 M. 304-347: Secondary Theme
 M. 348-350: virtuosic pianism
 M. 351-366: primary theme
 M. 367-378: horn fifths theme
 M. 379-387: primary theme fragments
 M. 388-391: horn fifths theme

M. 392-396: horn fifths theme layered with secondary theme
 M. 397-410: primary theme
 M. 411-419: transitional theme
 M. 420-428: primary theme
 M. 429-435: virtuosic pianism
 M. 436-440: horn fifths theme

As one can see, the primary and secondary themes are quite distinct from one another.

Beach does lean more heavily than one might anticipate on the horn fifths theme, which she introduces by layering with the primary theme but later becomes featured on its own. However, its use most frequently appears in transitional sections, most acutely so in the development, and its content cannot be confused with either of the other main themes. She saves layering this horn fifths theme with the secondary theme for one of the most special moments in the entire concerto, a Picardy third modulation to D-flat major near the end of the cadenza. This thematic layering and her astute large-scale formal awareness might even be lauded as a stroke of genius if this moment were written instead by a male composer.

Beyond these three main themes, she also makes use of a separate transitional theme thrice: once in the exposition, another brief time in the development, and one last time in the coda. Lastly, a few short sections were labeled as “virtuosic pianism”: passages that heavily showcase the pianist’s virtuosity without a clear connection to any of the main themes but appear in even the most tightly constructed Romantic-era piano concerti. Hale’s criticism of the work’s “overabundance of outside ornamentation” could easily describe the decorative style of any other Romantic-era concerto, particularly those by Chopin, Liszt, and Tchaikovsky. Without abundant virtuosity, the role of the piano in a concerto becomes greatly diminished, and given that Beach wrote the piece as a showcase for herself, one can hardly find her at fault for allowing her

pianism a chance to shine.

Macdonald asserts that “thematic repetition and transformation are the principal means of tying together the various parts of the long first movement”, believing Hale and his fellow critics were unwilling to consider this method of coherence.⁴⁰ In fact, this method of re-hearing the work may have compelled the first truly positive critical review, given by Bernice Thompson of the Washington Post in 1904: “One of the favorable features of this work is the richness and variety in the treatment of its principal theme. Every time this theme appears it has an entirely different harmonic setting from that in any of its previous announcements⁴¹.” Thompson went on to claim Beach’s compositions as a whole: “if [they] do not find more men admirers it is not the fault of the music but of the men themselves”. As the first review of this work written by a woman, one might even infer that this is the first truly fair such review, unclouded by gender bias.

Before completing my analytical work, the other movements of the concerto merit a brief mention as well. Critics wrote little about the second movement, a somewhat unconventional *perpetuum mobile* Scherzo; Hale characterizes this as “harmonically monotonous” without further elaboration. This claim can be easily disproven, as Beach changes key frequently throughout this movement, continuing to make use of modulation by thirds by exploring such keys as C-sharp major (a major third higher) and F major (a major third lower), among several others, while retaining her rich harmonic language from the first movement full of surprises. The third movement - in a rounded binary form - comes closest to being Beach’s traditional slow

⁴⁰ Macdonald, p. 46

⁴¹ Music and Musicians: Quotations from The Washington Post for January 10th, 17th, and 24th, 1904

movement, but the return of its opening section towards the end is heavily truncated, finishing on yet another augmented sixth chord and continuing on *attacca* into the fourth and final movement. Hale again makes a brief claim about this movement without providing any supporting details, describing it as “palpably Wagnerian”; only one other critic from the premiere mentions this movement at all, curiously also describing it as Wagnerian. Given Wagner’s status as an icon of the Romantic era, one can imagine this being a backhanded compliment: in their view, Beach may have picked a respectable composer to copy, but would be immediately labeled as unoriginal. Again, their arguments hold little weight due to lack of evidence, as Beach does not directly quote Wagner at all; while there may be similarities in the harmonic language, one could find equivalent harmonic similarities and chromaticism in nearly any composer around the turn of the century. Lastly, Hale simply claims about the finale that “not one measure remains in the memory”. By contrast, another reviewer, Louis Elson, expresses his preference for the finale as the “most decisive and most original” of the four, although again with little expansion on this statement⁴². Because modern reviewers and critics largely agree that the concerto’s myriad memorable tunes consists of one of this concerto’s greatest strengths, the author finds little reason for this particular claim of Hale’s to hold much weight.

Beach embarked on a fortuitously-timed performance tour to Germany in 1913-14, including three performances of the piano concerto. Notably, German culture at the time was more progressive in gender norms than the United States; as such, critics largely concur that audiences were more receptive to hearing works by women composers. Furthermore, German

⁴² Elson, *Daily Advertiser*

audiences and critics were more familiar with the complexity of the nature of Beach's harmonic language than their American counterparts. Given these favorable circumstances, Beach's performances received effusive praise. For example, one reviewer of the *Berlin Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* writes: "The concerto is very cleverly written, and most effective in its musical construction. . . . The themes are worked out in a most artistic style"⁴³. A Hamburg reviewer adds: "This work finds its highest point in the opening allegro - a surpassing movement, rich in ideas, in the romantic element, and marked by its refined treatment not only of the solo instrument, but of the orchestra"⁴⁴. This comment stands in stark contrast to the 1900 Boston critics, who came to the consensus that the orchestration was too heavy-handed⁴⁵; Hale even went as far as to say: "It is a pity she has never had a thorough, severe drill in theory and orchestration."⁴⁶

After returning from Europe due to the outbreak of World War I, she embarked on an American tour, beginning in Los Angeles (June 1915) and San Francisco (August 1915) before working her way eastward through Chicago (February 1916), St. Louis (January 1917), returning to Boston (March 1917) and finishing in Minneapolis (December 1917)⁴⁷. Critical reviews were more favorable than her premiere, but less so than the Germans, as evidenced by these conflicting reviews from her Chicago performance:

⁴³ Quoted in "Berlin's Praise of Mrs. Beach," *Musical Courier* 68, no. 13 (25 February 1914): 13.

⁴⁴ Quoted in "Amy Beach (Mrs. H.H.A. Beach) in Hamburg," advertisement in *The Musical Courier* 67, no. 27 (31 December 1913): 50.

⁴⁵ Macdonald, p. 44

⁴⁶ Macdonald, p. 47

⁴⁷ Macdonald, p. 50

“The composer evidently gave much care and thought to the construction of the work. Its working out is painstaking, its balance between solo instrument and orchestra is excellent; it is not too long, it is perfectly clear. From a structural point of view it is entirely praiseworthy” (*Chicago Journal*, 5 February 1916).

“[The concerto] was not apparently conceived as an organic whole in which the piano formed but one of the essential elements, but it took form rather as a series of soli for the piano about which the orchestra was written [*sic*]. This gave it a somewhat disjointed effect, with the orchestra appearing and disappearing in a rather confusing manner” (*Evening Post*, 5 February 1916).

In summation, Macdonald writes: “On grounds that later became irrelevant, [critics] faulted the form and the balance between soloist and orchestra, and passed over the thematic cohesiveness and harmonic richness... Critical opinion changed when Beach played the Concerto in Germany and throughout the United States in 1913-17, but this was more an acknowledgment of her growing fame than a reappraisal of the work itself.”⁴⁸

Compared to form, evaluating the merit of a work’s orchestration constitutes a considerably more subjective endeavor. Furthermore, the quality of any given performance can significantly alter a listener’s perception of the orchestration, particularly an orchestra’s sensitivity to balance. The 1900 world premiere may have indeed suffered this fate, perhaps a less refined performance than Beach’s later performances in the 1910s, causing the critics to unite in their criticism of her orchestration. Of the eight reviews from that performance, all but one mention orchestration, most succinctly stated by Hale: “The orchestration was crude and necessarily ineffective.” Given the inherent subjectivity of evaluating orchestration and high degree of variance from performance to performance, and taking into account the clear consensus of modern-day reviewers that praise Beach’s orchestration, one cannot draw any meaningful conclusions on orchestration from the 1900 critics alone. Unfortunately for Beach,

⁴⁸ Macdonald, p. 55

these critics were the only authoritative voices to comment publicly on her orchestration for over a decade, so their writings shaped and represented the prevailing public opinion. Teresa Carreño, in a letter to Beach the month after the premiere, expressed Beach's predicament most clearly:

"How can anyone, whilst listening to a musical, important, complicated and long work be able to form a final opinion from one hearing? Or even two?"⁴⁹.

Setting aside abstract musical parameters such as form and orchestration, Block's claim that Beach intended the concerto to have autobiographical meaning merits consideration in the context of critics. From this perspective, Beach's primary intention may not have been to simply compose a piano concerto as a work of absolute music within the grand Romantic tradition, but to tell the story of her life and work through this genre so perfectly suited to her strengths as both a performer and a composer. Through this lens, then, we may understand some of her choices - her deviations from the conventions of sonata-allegro form - as reflecting the ways in which her own path took on its own unique shape and form. This would explain her direct quotation of melodies from her own earliest published art song in each of the first three movements: "Jeune fille et jeune fleur," op. 1 no. 3 in the first movement; "Empress of the Night", op. 2 no. 3 in the second movement; and "Twilight", op. 2 no. 1 in the third movement.⁵⁰ Notably, the finale - aside from a brief interjection recollecting the third movement - largely avoids these nostalgic quotations, generating fresh melodic material, as if to represent her maturation as a composer over the years.

⁴⁹ Block, *Amy Beach*, 1998, 145.

⁵⁰ Block, "A Veritable Autobiography", p. 396

In short, any limited chance Beach's concerto had of becoming more popular was so hamstrung by reviewers of the premiere that even partial rehabilitation in the 1910s could not turn the tide. Scholars also note that an increasing emphasis on modernism and a rejection of the aesthetic of Romanticism as the 20th century progressed likely suppressed whatever momentum there may have been to revive her work, an unfortunate combination resulting in this concerto languishing in obscurity for decades.

V. Conclusion

Before concluding, I acknowledge that one cannot truly prove quality of a work of art, as determining a musical work's worth constitutes far too subjective to be a beneficial scholarly endeavor; nor do I believe that one can prove beyond a shadow of doubt malicious intent on behalf of music critics who have been dead for over a century. That said, structural and systemic sexism, both in classical music and society at large, has been clearly documented at length across music history, and it would be foolish to ignore its impact, even on a composer as well-regarded during her lifetime as Beach. Through her own writings and biographies, we have clear evidence that Beach herself was acutely aware of the historical significance of her prominence as a woman composer and pianist, particularly through her 1918 essay "To The Girl Who Wants to Compose"⁵¹. Therefore, one must analyze her work through this lens and understand how it was received during her lifetime in order to continue this work and understanding into the 21st-century.

Throughout the history of Western classical music, the most often performed and highly regarded composers have been white men. Germanic music, in particular, has been idealized as the zenith of composition ever since the days of J. S. Bach, continuing through the Classical era (Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert), Romantic (Mendelssohn, Brahms, Wagner, and Mahler), and entering the 20th century (Schoenberg, Berg, Webern). This belief has been codified in the works of music theorists such as Heinrich Schenker, whose methods and writings have shaped the field, for better or worse, for over a century, and upheld by generations of music critics. Composers of other nationalities are admitted into the canon through their adaptation of

⁵¹ Beach, "To The Girl Who Wants to Compose", *Etude Magazine*, 1918

Germanic compositional techniques such as imitative counterpoint, traditional classical forms (especially sonata-allegro form), refined treatment of melodies and motives (such as Schoenberg's developing variation), and an extreme economy of musical material. Other parameters - such as melody, harmony, orchestration, and virtuosic technique - are sometimes emphasized by other national schools of composition (e.g. France with harmony and orchestration, Russia with melody and virtuosity), but rarely centered when discussing the quality of work.

More broadly, this phenomenon can be categorized as the mythical norm in classical music, a phrase coined by Audre Lorde, a Black American civil rights activist, philosopher, and influential writer. Lorde defines the concept in the following way: "Somewhere, on the edge of consciousness, there is what I call a mythical norm, which each one of us within our hearts knows 'that is not me'. In America, this norm is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within this society."⁵²

Given Lorde's criteria and definition, I posit that the mythical norm of classical music can be defined as such: music by dead, white, and heterosexual composers that strictly adheres to Classical forms and imitates the compositional techniques of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms. For a privileged few, deviations from these forms are considered strokes of genius; for everyone else, deviations signify a lack of talent, insufficient study of the masters, or - worst of all - an indictment of one's ethnicity or gender. It should be noted that these Classical forms came about not through the widespread adaptation of a definition in a textbook, but through centuries of the

⁵² Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex", p. 116

natural evolution of music and composition, and were only later ascribed to the music of the canon. For Beach, given the framework of this mythical norm, that her music would be more warmly received and that she would be granted more respect as a musician after her successful 1913 tour to Germany seems inevitable. (After all, history and tradition assures the classical music industry that German composers and critics are granted superiority⁵³.)

The classical music industry has begun to reckon with this more intensely in recent years, particularly in the wake of broader social justice movements in the 2020s sparked by George Floyd's murder. Music theorist Philip Ewell refers to this phenomenon as classical music's "white racial frame"; Organizations such as Donne, Kassia, and others track the programming of major symphony orchestras, opera companies, and other major institutions of the industry, demonstrating how limited some of the gains have been and continuing to advocate not only for greater inclusion and equity, but a re-imagination of the field as a whole. Oboist Katherine Needleman has dedicated years of tireless advocacy to these causes, serving as one of today's most prominent voices on social media and inspiring thousands more to work towards not only significantly increased inclusion for women in classical music, but in questioning power structures and their very existence. Most directly, she asserts the following about the importance of repertoire and representation (or lack thereof): "Repertoire has always been a sorting mechanism. It shows you who is centered and who is ornamental. It shows you who gets endless revival, who becomes a god, and who gets one weekend, if that."⁵⁴

⁵³ Author's note of clarification: this is not an opinion that I personally hold or believe to be true, but rather one historically pervasive, acutely so in the early 20th century, and still intuitively believed by some classical musicians and critics to this day.

⁵⁴ Needleman via Facebook, January 20th, 2026 - look up how to cite this better

Much of this document has been dedicated to analyzing Beach's work within the framework of the canon, comparing it to the "mythical norm" of the 19th-century piano concerto. This work is necessary for classical musicians to understand Beach's work in the context of its time, and indeed likely represents the way in which she conceived of this concerto and the lens through which critics understood it. However, this approach can be limiting, as described by Lorde: "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house"⁵⁵. While one can attempt to prove that Beach's concerto deserves to be performed as often as those by her white male contemporaries through analysis and comparison to the mythical norm of the piano concerto, this approach still centers the European-white-male-centric tradition as the gold standard; proving how Beach measures up to the standard does not address the root cause of having the standard itself forged through centuries of this tradition. To once again quote Needleman: "Having a woman at the top is not the same thing as representation. One woman presiding over a system built and maintained by men does not rebalance a system which has been screwing women over for centuries. It stabilizes it. It allows men to point to something and say, 'look, everything is great for women now!'"⁵⁶

To fully appreciate and rehabilitate Beach's concerto requires approaching and being open to receive the work on its own terms, not through comparison to the mythical norm. Until the world of classical music fully reckons with - and achieves abolition from - the flawed status of the white-male-centric canon, Beach's concerto - and many more by other marginalized composers - will remain under-represented and under-performed.

⁵⁵ Lorde, *Sister Outsider*, p. 110

⁵⁶ Needleman via Facebook, January 19th, 2026

Appendix A: Complete List of Performances of Beach's Concerto with Piano and Orchestra

Author's note: one of the catalysts that spurred the creation this document was the lack of a publicly searchable database highlighting a complete and thorough list of performances of the work, as I attempted to figure out whether or not my October 2023 performance would be the Pacific Northwest or Oregon premiere. While this list will continue to expand as new pianists champion the work, performances taking place during the Information Age are much easier to find via user-friendly search engines compared to those pre-2000.

* denotes recording available

April 7, 1900, Boston, Massachusetts: Boston Symphony Orchestra; Amy Beach, piano; Wilhelm Gericke, conductor

January 17, 1911, Washington, D. C.: Washington Symphony Orchestra, Dagmar de Corval Ruebner, soloist; Heinrich Hammer, conductor⁵⁷

November 22, 1913, Leipzig, Germany: Amy Beach, soloist; Theodore Spiering, conductor;

December 2, 1913, Hamburg, Germany: Amy Beach, soloist; Theodore Spiering, conductor

December 18, 1913, Berlin, Germany: Amy Beach, soloist; Theodore Spiering, conductor

June 26, 1915, Los Angeles, California: Los Angeles Symphony Orchestra, Amy Beach, soloist; Adolf Tandler, conductor

August 1, 1915, San Francisco, California: Panama-Pacific International Exposition Orchestra; Amy Beach, soloist; Richard Hageman, conductor

⁵⁷ Rushing, p. 28; first performance of the work by a pianist besides Beach

February 4, 1916, Chicago, Illinois: Chicago Symphony Orchestra; Amy Beach, soloist;
Frederick Stock, conductor

January 12/13, 1917, St. Louis, Missouri: St. Louis Symphony Orchestra; Amy Beach soloist;
Max Zach, conductor

March 2/3, 1917, Boston, Massachusetts: Boston Symphony Orchestra; Amy Beach, soloist; Karl
Muck, conductor

December 14-15, 1917, St. Paul, Minnesota; Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra (now Minnesota
Orchestra), Amy Beach, soloist; Emil Oberhoffer, conductor (note: likely Beach's final public
performance of the work)⁵⁸

1923, Asheville, North Carolina: Helen Pugh, soloist; Henry Hadley, conductor; orchestra
unknown, occasion: National Federation of Music Clubs biennial meeting

1975, Washington, D. C.; Mary Louise Boehm, Bicentennial parade of American Music

October 10, 1975; San Francisco Symphony Fall Orchestra: Virginia Eskin, soloist; Niklaus
Wyss, conductor⁵⁹

April 4, 1976, Hempstead, New York: American Symphony Orchestra; Mary Louise Boehm,
soloist; Morton Gould, conductor⁶⁰

February 25, 1977, Nashua, New Hampshire: Nashua Symphony Orchestra; Virginia Eskin,
soloist; Royston Nash, conductor⁶¹

⁵⁸All other entries 1900-1917: Rushing, p. 21

⁵⁹ Robert Commanday, San Francisco Chronicle, September 30th, 1975

⁶⁰ [https://www.nyshistoricnewspapers.org/?a=d&d=tbt19760318-01.1.11&srpos=5&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN-"amy+beach"+"piano+concerto"-----](https://www.nyshistoricnewspapers.org/?a=d&d=tbt19760318-01.1.11&srpos=5&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN-)

⁶¹ Nashua Telegraph, February 23, 1977

December 9, 1977, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse Symphony Orchestra; Mary Louise Boehm, soloist; Christopher Keene, conductor⁶²

October 28, 1984, New York, New York: The Mrs. H.H.A. Beach Festival Chorus and Orchestra; Mary Louise Boehm, soloist, Michael May, conductor⁶³

December 1-2, 1989, Salt Lake City, Utah; Utah Symphony; Virginia Eskin, soloist; Joseph Silverstein, conductor⁶⁴

January 21-22, 1994, Chicago, Illinois: New Philharmonic; Mary Louise Boehm, soloist; conductor unknown⁶⁵

October 7, 1994, Annapolis, Maryland: Annapolis Symphony, Virginia Eskin, soloist; Gisele Ben-Dor, conductor

January 1995, date unknown; New York, New York: Manhattan Chamber Sinfonia, Joanne Polk, soloist; Glen Cortese, conductor*

October 27, 1995, Rochester, NY: Eastman Philharmonia, Alan Feinberg, soloist; Emily Freeman Brown, conductor⁶⁶

January 11-12, 1997, Santa Barbara, CA: Santa Barbara Symphony, Virginia Eskin, soloist; Gisele Ben-Dor, conductor⁶⁷

⁶² [https://www.nyshistoricnewspapers.org/?a=d&d=bpp19991117-01.1.52&srpos=9&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN-"amy+beach"+"piano+concerto"-----](https://www.nyshistoricnewspapers.org/?a=d&d=bpp19991117-01.1.52&srpos=9&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN-)

⁶³ <https://www.nytimes.com/1984/10/29/arts/music-at-carnegie-hall-works-of-mrs-hha-beach.html>

⁶⁴ Recording: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hcecDAy2RO8>

⁶⁵ *The Life*, author unknown, December 22nd, 1993; article erroneously lists this as Chicago premiere

⁶⁶ [https://www.nyshistoricnewspapers.org/?a=d&d=gcp19951019-01.1.70&srpos=2&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN-"amy+beach"+"piano+concerto"-----](https://www.nyshistoricnewspapers.org/?a=d&d=gcp19951019-01.1.70&srpos=2&e=-----en-20--1--txt-txIN-)

⁶⁷ Greg Hettmansberger, *Santa Barbara News-Press*, January 14th, 1997

August 18, 1998, Chautauqua, NY: Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra, Alan Feinberg, soloist; Stuart Malina, conductor⁶⁸

March 21, 2000, London, United Kingdom: English Chamber Orchestra; Joanne Polk, soloist; Paul Goodwin, conductor*

March 25, 2000, San Francisco, CA: Women's Philharmonic; Joanne Polk, soloist, Apo Hsu, conductor⁶⁹

March 24, 2001, Greenfield, MA: Pioneer Valley Symphony; Virginia Eskin, soloist; Paul Philipps, conductor⁷⁰

November 8, 2008, San Francisco, California: Symphony Parnassus, Daniel Glover, soloist; Dawn Harms, conductor*

October 10, 2010, Hanover, New Hampshire; Conn. Vallery Orchestra, Virginia Eskin, soloist; conductor unknown

November 15/17, 2012, Rochester, New York: Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra; Saet Byeol Kim, soloist; Max Culpepper, conductor*

May 21, 2015, Troy, Michigan: Troy High School Symphony Orchestra; Karen Cao, soloist; Alan MacNair, conductor*

November 14, 2015: Augusta Symphony Orchestra: Virginia Eskin, soloist; conductor unknown
Hampshire Philharmonic, Virginia Eskin, soloist; conductor unknown

⁶⁸ Rushing, p. 30

⁶⁹ Joanne Polk, <https://joannepolkpianist.com/>

⁷⁰ Clifton J. Nobile, *The Republican*, March 23rd, 2001

January 25, 2016, Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Symphony, Geneva Stonecipher, soloist; Mark Cedel, conductor⁷¹

November 18, 2017, Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis-Wellesley Orchestra, Randall Hodgkinson, soloist; Neal Hampton, conductor*

August 3, 2017, Stockholm, Sweden, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra; Terés Löf, soloist; Tung-Chieh Chuang, conductor⁷²

November 23, 2017, Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala Kammarorkester, Danny Driver, soloist; Rebecca Miller, conductor⁷³

February 13, 2019, New York, NY: InterSchool Symphony Orchestra of New York; Mika Sasaki, soloist; Petro Dimitrov, conductor⁷⁴

2019, Gainesville, Georgia: Northwinds Symphonic Band; Allie Heard, soloist; Mercer Crook, conductor* (note: arrangement for winds by Steve Coldiron)

February 8, 2020, Miami, Florida: Orchestra Miami; Asiya Korepanova, soloist; Elaine Rinaldi, conductor

April 30, 2022, Plymouth, Massachusetts: Plymouth Philharmonic, Randall Hodgkinson, soloist; Steven Karidoyanes, conductor

March 13, 2023, Tokyo, Japan: Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra; Hisako Kawamura, soloist; Kazuki Yamada, conductor

⁷¹ Baker, p. 44

⁷² <https://www.konserthuset.se/en/programme/calendar/concert/2017/at-skansen/>

⁷³ <https://www.musikiuppland.se/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Orkesterprogram23nov2017.pdf>

⁷⁴ <https://www.mikasasaki.com/2018-2019.html>

October 7, 2023, Hamburg, Germany: Hamburg Camerata; Zlata Chochieva, soloist; Vilmantas Kaliunas, conductor

October 24, 2023, Eugene, Oregon: University of Oregon Symphony; Andrew Cannestra, soloist; Rodrigo Gonzalez Jacob, conductor*

February 24, 2024, Ann Arbor, Michigan: Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra; Allison Shinnick, piano; Jacob Joyce, conductor

April 22, 2024, Tempe, Arizona: Arizona State University Symphony Orchestra; Miki Aoki, soloist; Jason Caslor, conductor*

September 27, 2024, Tuscaloosa, Alabama: Huxford Symphony; Anne-Marie McDermott, soloist; Ransom Wilson, conductor

October 4, 2024, Flagstaff, Arizona: Flagstaff Symphony Orchestra; Aimee Fincher, soloist; Desmond Siu, conductor

October 5, 2024, Flagstaff, Arizona: Orchestra Northern Arizona; Aimee Fincher, soloist; Desmond Siu, conductor

October 24, 2024, Springfield, Massachusetts: Springfield Symphony Orchestra; Anne-Marie McDermott, soloist; Mei-Ann Chen, conductor

November 1-3, 2024, Dallas, Texas: Dallas Symphony Orchestra; Anne-Marie McDermott, soloist; Anu Tali, conductor*

April 19, 2025, New York, New York; Pegasus: The Orchestra; Asiya Korepanova, soloist; Karen Hakobyan, conductor

July 23, 2025, Boston, Massachusetts: Boston Landmarks Orchestra; Asiya Korepanova, soloist; Christopher Wilkins, conductor

January 17, 2026, Abilene, Texas: Abilene Philharmonic Orchestra; Asiya Korepanova, soloist;
David Itkin, conductor

January 24, 2026, Anchorage, Alaska: Anchorage Symphony Orchestra; Ying Li, soloist;
Elizabeth Schulze, conductor

March 7, 2026, Buenos Aires, Argentina: Buenos Aires Philharmonic Orchestra; Asiya
Korepanova, soloist; Zoe Zeniodi, conductor

March 14/15, 2026, Hagerstown, Maryland: Maryland Symphony Orchestra; Ying Li, soloist;
Elizabeth Schulze, conductor

Appendix B: Complete List of Commercial Recordings of Beach's Concerto

1976, Westphalian Symphony Orchestra; Mary Louise Boehm, soloist; Siegfried Landau, conductor; Vox Productions, Inc.

1999, English Chamber Orchestra, Joanne Polk soloist; Paul Goodwin, conductor, Arabesque Records

April 2003, Nashville Symphony Orchestra; Alan Feinberg, soloist; Kenneth Schermerhorn, conductor; Naxos Records (American Classics)

March 2017 (recorded - find publication date), Glasgow, United Kingdom: BBC Scottish Symphony; Danny Driver, soloist; Rebecca Miller, conductor; Hyperion Records

Appendix C: List of Recordings Compiled for First Movement Length Comparison

Author's notes/methodology: I have chosen the following 19th-century concerti as a representative sample of standard works whose first movements follow sonata-allegro form. I have decided to remove from consideration both numbered Liszt concerti, as they follow a large single-movement structure with internal sections functioning as the different "movements", as well as Saint-Saëns Concerto No. 2, whose first movement does not use sonata form. Lastly, I have decided to exclude Rachmaninov's Concerto No. 1, a relatively juvenile work that, while technically of the 19th-century (1891), was not performed in the United States until the late 1910s, and - as such - would not have been considered a frame of reference to critics.

I have selected six recordings of each work to form a representative sample, incorporating some of the most historically significant recordings by the most widely regarded pianists. Because only four commercial recordings exist of Beach's concerto, I have included my own recording with the University of Oregon Symphony and a high-quality live recording by Anne-Marie McDermott and the Dallas Symphony alongside these commercial recordings. While historically noteworthy and musically brilliant, I have excluded Virginia Eskin's 1989 live recording with the Utah Symphony, as the first movement contains a substantial cut not present in other recordings and an amended cadenza.

Beach 17:48 Feinberg/Nashville Symphony

17:17 Boehm/Westphalian Orchestra

19:26 Polk/English Chamber

20:29 Cannestra/UO Symphony

19:52 McDermott/Dallas Symphony

18:33 Aoki/ASU Symphony

Average: 18:54

Beethoven 3 16:55 Zimerman/Vienna

17:47 Uchida/Berlin

17:15 João Pires/Swedish Radio

16:40 Perahia/Concertgebouw

15:29 Serkin/New York

15:54 Pollini/Vienna

Average: 16:40

Beethoven 4 19:17 Zimerman/Vienna

20:08 Uchida/Berlin

19:43 João Pires/Swedish Radio

18:56 Perahia/Concertgebouw

17:38 Serkin/Philadelphia

17:20 Pollini/Vienna

Average: 18:50

Beethoven 5 20:45 Zimerman/Vienna

21:04 Uchida/Berlin

21:01 Barenboim/Berlin

20:30 Perahia/Concertgebouw

19:32 Serkin/New York

20:29 Pollini/Berlin

Average: 20:33

Chopin 1 23:24 Zimerman/Polish Festival

19:11 Argerich/Montreal

19:42 Rubinstein/Symphony of the Air

18:30 Kissin/Moscow

20:44 Arrau/London

20:24 João Pires/Royal Philharmonic

Average: 20:19

Chopin 2 15:36 Zimerman/Polish Festival

13:43 Argerich/Montreal

13:20 Rubinstein/Symphony of the Air

13:08 Kissin/Moscow

14:42 Arrau/London

14:24 Cho/London

Average: 14:08

Brahms 1 23:27 Zimerman/Berlin
 21:02 Pollini/Berlin
 24:08: Gilels/Berlin
 20:53 Freire/Gewandhausorchester
 21:52 Levit/Vienna
 22:06 Schiff/Age of Enlightenment

Average: 22:14

Brahms 2 18:18 Zimerman/Vienna
 17:45 Pollini/Berlin
 18:17 Gilels/Berlin
 18:11 Freire/Gewandhausorchester
 16:54 Levit/Vienna
 17:43 Schiff/Age of Enlightenment

Average: 17:51

Tchaikovsky 1 23:41 Kissin/Berlin
 21:08 Argerich/Royal Philharmonic
 22:09 Richter/Vienna
 20:40 Cliburn/RCA Symphony
 20:37 Pletnev/Philharmonia
 23:01 Lang/Chicago

Average: 21:52

Grieg 12:33 Rubinstein/RCA Victor
 14:02 Zimerman/Berlin
 13:50 Lupu/London
 12:34 Thibaudet/Rotterdam
 12:41 Richter/Orchestre National de Opera de Monte-Carlo
 14:06 Cziffra/Budapest

Average: 13:17

Robert Schumann 16:27 Rubinstein/Chicago
 15:32 Zimerman/Berlin
 14:37 Lupu/London
 14:40 Richter/Orchestre National de Opera de Monte-Carlo
 14:19 Argerich/National Symphony
 16:05 Kissin/London

Average: 15:16

Mendelssohn 1 7:05 Perahia/St. Martin-in-the-Fields
 6:55 Thibaudet/Gewandhausorchester
 6:57 Wang/Verbier
 7:15 Hough/City of Birmingham
 7:31 Lang/Chicago
 7:23 Lisiecki/Orpheus Chamber

Average: 7:11

Appendix D: Comprehensive Newspaper Clipping Quotes from Beach's Lifetime, in Chronological Order

Author's note: the following compilation owes a great debt to Claudia Macdonald, the first to publish critical reviews from Beach's performances of the concerto, as well as Katrina Carlson Rushing, who compiled a majority of these reviews in her dissertation. All reviews in bold are un-published, whereas the rest first appear in Rushing's work.

Sub-section I: Boston World-Premiere Reviews

"It is now a week since the concerto was played, with Mrs. Beach herself as the pianist, and the disappointment of the first night is only deeper today. The concerto was a disappointment in nearly every way. The structure was large, pretentious; there was an overabundance of outside ornamentation, but the interior was bare and commonplace, and there is a well-defined suspicion that the foundations and walls were not substantial. The themes were not distinguished; the development was too often vague and rambling; the moods, when there were moods, were those of other composers; thus the mood of the opening [part] of the was palpably Wagnerian. The first movement was long drawn out, and when there was the thought of the end, there was a curiously unexpected and meaningless appendix. The scherzo was harmonically monotonous, and the finale - not one measure now remains in the memory. The orchestration was crude and necessarily ineffective. There were notes, notes, notes; and where there were so many notes there were inevitably a few pretty passages; but there was little or no display of vital musical thought, proportion, skill in structure, or taste or brilliance in orchestra expression." Philip Hale, *Boston Journal*

"She has done pretty near everything that possibly can be done with pianoforte and orchestra; there is material - essential and ornamental - enough in it to make two concertos. It is overloaded with figural ornamentation and contrapuntal cleverness. To make some of her combinations effective and clear would take the skill of a Richard Strauss." Author unknown, *Boston Transcript*

"The whole first movement seemed rather indefinite at a first hearing; although there were many passages of much charm, there did not seem to be that coherency and clear scheme which one finds in the masterpieces; it was a case of the dove soaring with the eagles. ... The largo, although given on the house-programme as combined with the finale, was in reality a movement of itself. It treated a figure which reminded of the fate-figure in Wagner's trilogy (Cesar Franck has also developed this figure in his D minor symphony) and indicated a pensive melancholy.

The finale seemed to us the best, most decisive and most original movement of the work. There were some phrases given in this that seemed to be in the vein of Dvorak's 'American Symphony'⁷⁵, although not suggesting plagiarism in the remotest degree. The entire movement was interesting and had many bold and striking contrasts." Louis Elson, *Daily Advertiser*

"As is the case with 'nearly all her sex,' the review opines, Beach 'lacked the power of coping with an orchestra like the Boston Symphony, especially where so many fortissimo passages occur.'" ⁷⁶

"The concerto is weak in ideas, and, on the whole, crabbed and uninteresting. There is but little of the flowing melody in it, with scarcely a moment of reposeful cantilena, the solo part being, for the most part, little else than difficult, and not always clear passage work. The orchestration is steadily thick and noisy, and too frequently so massive that the solo instrument does not and cannot loom through it...the concerto is monotonously void of contrasts. There are fire enough and passion enough in the work, but they did not appear to lead to anything that was coherent or comprehensible. The most marked thing about Mrs. Beach's new work is its masculinity, strength and largeness looming in every direction." W. D. Quint, *Boston Traveller*

"No doubt there is much beauty in the work, no little genuineness of feeling, a considerable fertility of invention. But there is too much going on at the same time; that is, too much until the work has been so rescored as to make its complexity intelligible to the ear." Source unknown, excerpted from Walter S. Jenkins, *The Remarkable Mrs. Beach, American Composer; A Biographical Account Based on Her Diaries, Letters, Newspaper Clippings, and Personal Reminiscences*, (Harmonie Park Press, 1994), 49.

Sub-section II: Performances in Germany, 1913

"We have before us undeniably a possessor of musical gifts of the highest kind; a musical nature touched with genius. Strong creative power, glowing fancy, instinct for form and color are united in her work with facile and effortless mastery of the entire technical apparatus. To this is added charm of poetic mood, delicacy and grace of melody, and a gift for rich, soulful harmonization. The piano concerto was played by Amy Beach herself. . . in a style which revealed her as an excellent pianist, with brilliant technique and contagious rhythm. This work finds its highest point in the opening allegro—a surpassing movement, rich in ideas in the romantic element, and marked by its refined treatment not only of the solo instrument, but of the orchestra." Author unknown, *The Musical Courier*

⁷⁵ now known as "New World" Symphony

⁷⁶ Macdonald, p. 44; original source unknown

Sub-section III: return to America, 1915-1917

“This is perhaps the greatest feat an American woman has performed in the musical world, and will long be remembered by those who saw it.” Luella Keller, *Monrovia Daily News*

“The composer evidently gave much care and thought to the construction of the work. Its working out is painstaking; its balance between solo instrument and orchestra is excellent.... [However,] the musical ideas of the work are not of the notable kind that command attention and stick to the memory. There are very few themes in all four movements that flow, that possess the powerful vitality which every large work ought to set forth”. Edward C. Moore, *Chicago Journal*

“It was not apparently conceived as an organic whole in which the piano formed but one of the essential elements, but it took form rather as a series of soli for the piano about which the orchestra was written. This gave it a somewhat disjointed effect, with the orchestra appearing and disappearing in a rather confusing manner. But the thematic foundation was strong, good, solid melodies that one could tie to.” Karleton Hackett, *Chicago Evening Post*

“The concerto itself is frank and ingenious, relying on its melodic facility and on its approved effects of the salon composer - a work, to draw comparison, developed to the ultimate degree of finesse in scores like Saint-Saëns’ G minor concerto, or the Grieg concerto. It is plausible in its orchestral setting, and as grateful under the fingers as it is in the ear.” Eric DeLamar, *Chicago Tribune*

"Still another American influence was shown in her free use of syncopation in the first movement. Despite its prevailing chromatic hues in melody, harmony, and counterpoint, the concerto abounded in clearly discernible tunes, for Mrs. Beach holds that the soul as well as the body requires its quota of sugar. The consequence is that although the work is technically most difficult - only a pianist and orchestra of the utmost expertness could perform it - there is also a fascinating popular appeal." Richard Stokes, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

“The Beach piano concerto in C-sharp minor is technically somewhat more advanced than the “Gaelic” symphony. In general construction and orchestral effects it is of orthodox docility towards classical and romantic patterns, but it offers the trait of a short largo that resembles a fourth movement inserted among the hallowed three. The recurrence of the largo theme in piano solo with cello obligato as a contrast in the final allegro is supreme among its many points of beauty. In the second theme proper of this final allegro which, according to tradition, must exhibit syncopation or cross rhythm, the composer has idealized a tendency in popular music that is recognized as truly American the world over.”

-Minneapolis Journal, December 15, 1917

“The presence, at last evening’s symphony concert in the Auditorium, of Mrs. H. H. A Beach’, composer of two of the programmed numbers and assisting soloist in one of them, gave singular interest to one of the pleasantest concerts thus far given in the current season.

Mrs. Beach's "Gaelic" symphony and pianoforte concerto in C sharp minor, with Chadwick's "Melpomene" overture, made up an all-American program."

-Minneapolis Morning Tribune, December 15, 1917

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