

Stockton Symphony Meet the Players Series

Strings in Spring

April 24, 2021

Grand Theatre Center for the Arts, Tracy, 10:00 am

Bella Vista Rooftop, 2:00 pm

Dagenais Smiley, violin

Joseph Galamba, violin

David Thorp, *viola*

Stephanie Chiao, *cello*

Amy Cheney Beach
(1867–1944)

String Quartet, op. 89 (in one movement)

Antonín Dvořák
(1841–1904)

String Quartet No. 12 in F major, op. 96, "The American"
II. Lento
III. Molto vivace
IV. Finale: Vivace ma non troppo

Program Notes

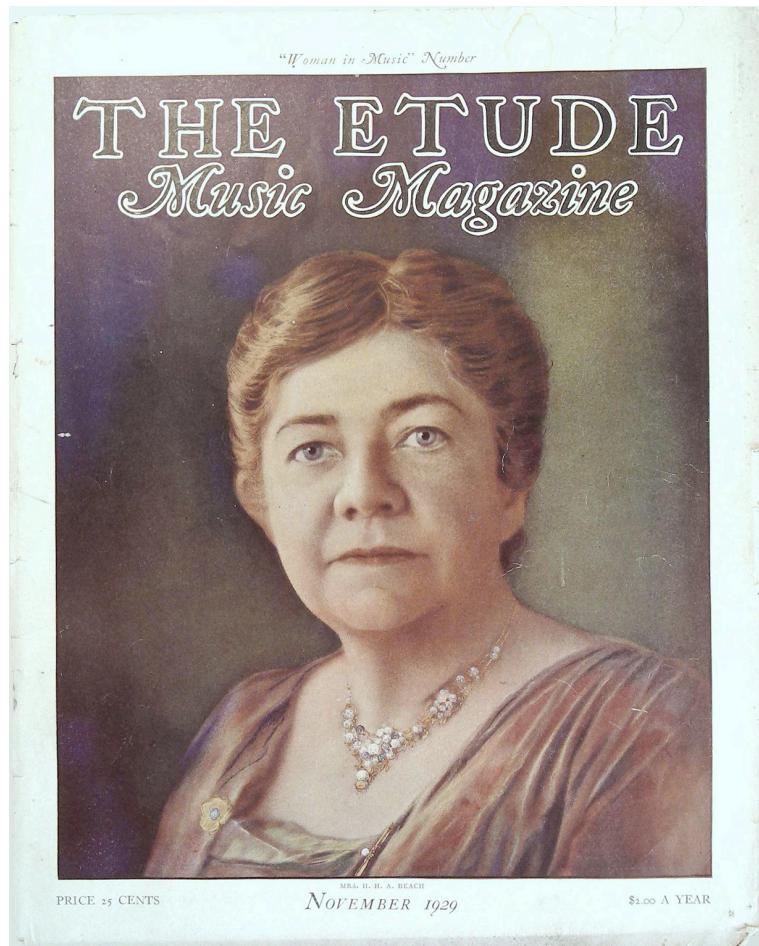
String Quartet, op. 89

Amy Marcy Beach

*Born in Henniker, New Hampshire,
September 5, 1867; died in New
York, December 27, 1944*

Amy Marcy Beach as she is now known—or Mrs. H.H.A. Beach as she liked to be called—was a member of a group of composers referred to as the “Boston classicists” or “Second New England School,” which ecstatically embraced the European Classic-Romantic tradition in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The group included John Knowles Paine, Arthur Foote, George Chadwick, Arthur Whiting, Horatio Parker, and Daniel Gregory Mason. Her style, based on traditional forms, is marked by the rich chromaticism, frequent modulation, intensity, and lyricism associated with late Romanticism.

As a professional musician Beach combined the career of a composer—whose compositions were almost all published and frequently performed—with that of a piano



virtuoso. The only child of parents from politically and culturally distinguished New England families, she showed prodigious skills that rivaled Mozart's. In 1885, the same year as her highly acclaimed performance as soloist with the Boston Symphony, she married Harvard Medical School physician Henry Harris Aubrey Beach, who was slightly older than her father; she was just seventeen. She curtailed her performing at his request and concentrated on composition.

Her training as a composer, she stated, was "completely unorthodox." It consisted mainly of digesting countless theoretical treatises in numerous languages and copying out works by Bach and Beethoven from memory. Her husband, who at one time considered a musical career, offered critical advice. Beach said later that "my husband refused to allow me to study formally, which in my earlier years I sometimes wanted to do, in the belief that such instruction would rob my work of its freedom and originality." After her husband's death in 1910 she rekindled her performing career, touring in the winter months and practicing and composing during summers.

Although she achieved great success both as a performer and composer, she was in many ways a victim of her family's and society's values. Marriage and social position were considered more important than her career, and critics of her compositions were almost always guilty of gender bias. It is to the credit of her independent spirit that she accomplished as much as she did.

In the 1890s a strong movement arose for composers to create a distinctly American national style, fueled by studies of Native American culture and music that had begun appearing already in the 1880s. It was Czech composer Antonín Dvořák who, having taken a teaching position in New York in 1892, provided the spark for the movement to take off. At the time of the premiere of his immensely successful *New World Symphony* in 1893, he issued his famous prescription for a national American style, saying it should be based on African American and Native American idioms.

Amy Beach was twenty-four at the time and at first resistant, saying not only that African American music was not indigenously American but that folk songs of any people should be used by composers who had grown up with them. Nevertheless, she was as interested in Dvořák's music as anyone and also appreciated the Native American influence on the music of Edward MacDowell and Arthur Farwell. As time went on, she ended up composing five works using Native American themes, including the present String Quartet.

Beach composed a draft of her one-movement Quartet in 1921 at the MacDowell artists' colony, completing its slight revision on a trip to Rome in 1929. She heard a private reading there in Rome and a semi-public performance in



String Quartet, 1921 draft

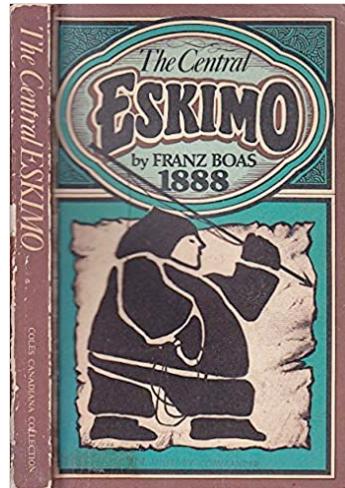
1931, but by the time of a gala performance in 1942 in honor of her seventy-fifth birthday she was too ill to travel to hear it in Washington, D.C. Despite critic Glenn Dunn raving that the work was “of such unusual beauty that an early repetition was most ardently desired by all” and her publisher’s interest, the String Quartet did not appear in print until 1994. It has since gained renown as a turning point in her works toward simpler themes, leaner textures, and a more directly expressive chromatic style.

The Quartet unfolds in a five-section arch form in which Beach draws on three Alaskan Inuit songs that she found in Franz Boas’s 1888 study, *The Central Eskimo*, where he gave them English titles. The haunting, highly chromatic, freely composed opening leads to the first of the borrowed themes, “Summer Song,” played as a viola solo. Shortly after the other instruments join in, the first violin presents the second folk song, “Playing at Ball,” and when the section becomes more animated Beach includes fragments of the song’s second part. This section (A) concludes with more of the “Summer Song” music.

The next section (B)—striking for its attention-getting chords and fast tempo—draws on the third Inuit theme, “Itatuajang’s Song.” Beach then brings in more fully the second part of “Playing at Ball,” identifiable by its dotted (long-short) rhythms.

The central section of the arch form (C) erupts in a fugue whose subject Beach derived from “Itatuajang’s Song,” followed by a return to the B music in varied guise. She rounds out the arch by recalling the slow A section, both its free, chromatic opening and variants of the first two Inuit songs. The piece closes in muted, ethereal poignance.

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Movements II, III, and IV from String Quartet No. 12 in F major, op. 96, “American”

Antonín Dvořák

*Born in Nelahozeves, near Kralupy, September 8,
1841; died in Prague, May 1, 1904*

Beginning in the fall of 1892 Dvořák served as artistic director and professor of composition at the National Conservatory of Music in America (in New York City) at the urging of the institution’s president, Jeannette Thurber, who offered him twenty-five times the amount he was being paid at the Prague Conservatory. His life in the U.S. was hectic with teaching, public appearances, and engagements as a



Antonín Dvořák, c. 1893

guest conductor, so he happily accepted an invitation to spend the summer of 1893 relaxing in a small farming community (300 residents) of Czech immigrants in Spillville, Iowa.

Overjoyed to be reunited with four of his children who had just arrived from Czechoslovakia with their aunt and a maid, Dvořák traveled to Spillville by

train in a party that also included his wife, his two

oldest children, and his secretary Josef Jan Kovařík who had grown up there. His delight at being in a rural setting among his countrymen immediately erupted in the composition of his *American Quartet*, which he sketched in only three days, June 8–10. At the end of the sketch he wrote: “Thanks to the Lord God, I am satisfied, it went quickly. Completed June 10, 1893.” Polishing the score occupied him until June 23, and members of the Kovařík family assisted in trying out the Quartet with the composer himself making his way through the first violin part. The Kneisel Quartet gave the premiere in Boston on New Year’s Day 1894 and in New York on January 12.

By far the most popular of Dvořák’s fourteen quartets, the *American* reflects his aim “to write something really melodious and simple.” As several scholars have pointed out, however, his effortless-sounding result masks remarkable unifying and thematic procedures. The first, second, and fourth movements all begin with an accompanimental backdrop before the main thematic material emerges. Dvořák chose the “pastoral key” of F major for his work, in which pedals or drones and permeating pentatonic themes (based on five “white-key” notes, F, G, A, C, D) help transmit a rural, “simple” flavor. We should note, too, that these traits relate to American, Slavic, and many other folk traditions.

Many commentators have singled out the nostalgic Lento (second movement) as the crowning movement of the Quartet, and Dvořák scholar Michael Beckerman has drawn attention to the Schubertian quality of its endless melody. Unfolding in a broad arch that comes to one of chamber music’s most exquisite climaxes, the movement relies primarily on the simple texture of the violin or cello carrying the melody with constant undulating support from the other instruments. Occasionally the second violin joins the first in a melodic role, as at the poignant climax. The final keening of the main theme by the cello against simple repeated chords rather than the former busy accompaniment lends an air of tragedy.

Dvořák bases his entire scherzo on the same theme, with a variant serving as the contrasting section, which appears twice. Kovařík suggested that the quiet high violin tune that enters shortly after the opening was inspired by a bird call Dvořák heard



Spillville, where Dvořák spent the summer of 1893

outside his home in Spillville. Though the exact species of bird has never been determined beyond question, the most likely candidate is the scarlet tanager.

The composer offsets the cheerful main theme of the rondo finale with episodes of more reflective quality. Toward the center, one of these quieter passages suggested to Dvořák scholar John Clapham an occasion when the composer enchanted the St. Wenceslas congregation of Spillville by spontaneously playing the organ during their typically music-less morning mass. The ebullient high spirits cannot be suppressed for long, and the movement ends with a plethora of affirmative phrases.

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Meet the Players

Dagenais Smiley, a Northern California native, earned her Bachelor of Music degree from the Oberlin Conservatory under the direction of Milan Vitek and her Master of Music degree from the University of Southern California's Thornton School of Music studying with Ms. Kathleen Winkler. An active orchestral musician, Dagenais has performed as acting associate concertmaster with the Sacramento Philharmonic and Opera and is currently assistant concertmaster with the Modesto Symphony. She also performs with the Stockton Symphony, the Monterey Symphony, the Fresno Symphony, the Reno Philharmonic, and various other Northern California orchestras. She teaches violin at UC Davis and maintains a private violin studio. Dagenais enjoys skiing, hiking, and playing Pokemon Go in her spare time.



Joseph Galamba started the violin in the public-school strings program in Yuba City with Ingrid Gaston. He underwent further formative studies with Kineko Barbini (née Okumura).

Joseph earned degrees in violin performance and in physics with honors at Oberlin College and Conservatory of Music where his primary teachers were Gregory Fulkerson and David Bowlin. He completed his Master of Music degree in violin performance at Indiana University–Bloomington under Sigurbjorn

Bernhardsson with a secondary concentration in music theory. He participated in masterclasses of James Buswell, Peter Otto, Jyung-Min Amy Lee, Fujiwara Hamao, and Lothar Strauss.

Joseph Galamba is a member of the first violin section in the Stockton Symphony. He plays on a modern American violin by Howard Needham.

David Thorp, a violist in the Stockton Symphony, has a bachelor's degree from the University of South Florida in Tampa and a master's degree from the Manhattan School of Music. He has performed as a soloist with the Light Opera of Manhattan and the American Philharmonic Orchestra of Lincoln Center, New York.

As a teacher, David stresses the use of the natural balances, eliminating the bow holds that so often cause headaches, backaches, and tendonitis. He also introduces ways to be aware of tonal and temporal spaces in music, helping to ease physical tensions and release stage fright and mental anxieties so that players of all levels fulfill their potential.



Stephanie Chiao, a graduate of the Oberlin Conservatory with a master's degree from Boston University, is currently principal assistant cellist of the Stockton Symphony. She is passionate about sharing music through teaching and performing. Suzuki-trained in piano from the age of six and with traditional cello training, she believes all can learn music and that learning music benefits students of all ages.

An alumna of both the Crowden School and the San Francisco Conservatory preparatory program, she is a seasoned, compassionate teacher who works with students to reach their potential by combining high quality instruction with opportunities for performance. Through numerous high-profile roles in educational organizations, she has remained committed to providing students

with the best opportunities to give outstanding performances. In addition to performing with orchestras throughout the area and on tour, she is also an avid chamber musician and solo performer.