

AMERICAN WOMAN WHOSE MUSICAL MESSAGE THRILLED GERMANY

Shipboard Glimpses of Mrs. H. H. A. Beach, Who Won Recognition Abroad Both as Composer and Interpreter of Her Own Works

BY CLARE P. PEELER



WE were follow-travelers, Mrs. Beach and I, on the "Creeping Cretic," as her passengers tenderly named the Atlantic liner that was taking a boatload of impatient Americans back to home and safety.

Our acquaintance dated from a wonderful sunset and our friendship from the minute we discovered that we felt alike about the war. It was a privilege anyone would appreciate, to meet and enjoy the conversation of one whose talent and hard work have raised her to a high level among musicians; but it was also a delight to know her as a charming woman, whose keen and well-balanced intellect never chilled her splendid sympathy for all things good and beautiful.

It has been fourteen years since Mrs. Beach played her piano concerto with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. What was then a notable achievement she has since distanced many a time. Her masses, her oratorios, her songs, each as they appeared, added to her reputation, and her remarkable ability as pianist apparently developed side by side with her equally wonderful talent as composer. Then there came great sorrow into her life and with it an enforced pause in the work.

Sorrow Halts Career

"I have been abroad three years," she said, "and the first year was one of almost entire rest. After the deaths of my husband and mother, one blow following the other so soon, it seemed to me as though I could not work, at least in public. Even in private to hear the music I adored wrung my heart for a while. Then, almost mechanically I began working again. In October, 1912, my violin sonata was given most successfully in Dresden and at Breslau; in January, 1913, in Munich. My violin quartet was performed by the Münchener Quartet, the members of which were perfectly delighted with it. They would like, they said, to give it all over Germany. Last Winter I brought out my piano concerto, playing it with the Berlin Philharmonic, and also played it at Hamburg and Leipzig. At the two last named concerts they played also my Symphony in E Minor, the same one which has been given by the Theodore Thomas and by the Boston Symphony Orchestra. So you see I was back in harness once more."

Musical Reminiscences

Just then Mr. Paul Draper, a young concert singer and pianist, strolled up to join us and the talk veered to some performances they had both heard in Munich—some wonderful singing by Mrs. Beach's valued friend, Marcella Craft, and then we talked of Beethoven and some never-to-be-forgotten performances of "Fidelio"; of Claire Dux and her remarkable singing in "The Magic Flute" this season; of some Dresden favorites, alas! fallen in the war—and then once more of the beloved Beethoven.

"Modern music demands the modern orchestra," said Mrs. Beach, "and it is most fascinating beyond words to work along those lines—but when one thinks of Beethoven, and what he accomplished with his comparatively few instruments!"

Mr. David Mannes had once told me that his most revered musicians were Beethoven, Brahms and Bach, I remarked and Mrs. Beach caught up the last name.

"Ah, Bach!" she exclaimed. "I don't mind calling him my idol of idols among composers. And his day is not even yet fully come. Do you remember how Chopin used to play nothing but Bach for a whole day before he gave a piano recital?"

"Harold Bauer does that," interpolated Mr. Draper.

To the BROWNING SOCIETY OF BOSTON.

The Year's at the Spring.

Music by Mrs. H. H. A. BEACH, Op. 44, No. 1.

Allegro di molto.

The year's at the And day's at the

PIANO. *p*

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*cresc.*

*a tempo*

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Mrs. H. H. A. Beach, American Composer, and a Fragment of Her Most Widely Known Song, "The Year's at the Spring"

"Some time I believe the day is coming when I shall play nothing else but Bach," she went on. "What he has said musically cannot be repeated."

A little more chat, some stories, and Mr. Draper left us while we continued our talk. I asked Mrs. Beach whether she had spent her time entirely in her well-beloved Germany.

Italy Stimulates Composers

"No," she returned. "I spent two months in Italy just for the colorful atmosphere of it and I was composing nearly the entire time. Even though I was supposed to be resting, I couldn't help it; it's in the air somehow. I saw a good deal of Sgambati, and had some beautiful times at his house. One evening I was playing for him and his wife and he entreated me to play some of my own work. So finally I did, and he said some things charming to hear. 'Now,' I said, 'I'll play you something I wish I had written'—and I did that wonderful nocturne of his. You know it, don't you? He was so pleased and his wife simply came over and kissed me. I am going to play the nocturne to-night at the ship's concert."

"Those two months in Italy were part of a time when I couldn't help writing music," Mrs. Beach went on, musingly. "After I got back to Germany I went right on with it. So I completed my new works I told you of; did two new songs for Schumann-Heink, wrote a song for George Hamlin—he is doing splendid work in concert; wrote two for Kitty Cheatham, one for my dear friend Marcella Craft (we were to have come back together, you know) and finished my hymn for the Panama Exposition. Then came this most horrible war, and the zest for everything left me."

Help for American Students

"Although the Germans were so wonderful, so self-controlled, so perfectly devoted to their Fatherland ideal, that noisy demonstrations of grief were impossible, one felt the pain of it all unceasingly. I thought of turning my house into a Red Cross center, but decided it was much better just to do what I could to help and advise my friends among the American students in Munich, who are most numerous. Many were the puzzles that were brought to me at that terrible time for solution. Those girls are so hard working, so splendid," she said. "Many of them have very small allowances, but they live so economically

and work so energetically that it is simply wonderful."

"Then you don't think there is so much danger to them from the so-called foreign atmosphere?"

"Not at all," Mrs. Beach said, emphatically. "In the first place, many of them live in pensions for girl students only, work all the time, and amuse themselves very little. Secondly, things in Munich, for instance, are so arranged that there is no menace or very little for the people who are anxious to avoid it. You can be perfectly free from annoyance if you keep among your own class of people. Then, in the third place, the concert stage is not the theatrical stage; the former is free from some of the influences which are said to exist in some of the European opera houses."

Most Critical Audiences

She smiled as she added, "It would, indeed, be a very foolish person who would attempt to conquer a Berlin, Munich, Leipzig or Dresden concert audience by anything in the world except good work. I felt that when I faced them all in turn. Nowhere in the world are there more critical audiences—nowhere audiences more generous with their applause when you have won them. You can't imagine how delighted I was, then, to win their approval."

"Then you didn't find any prejudice existing in Germany towards Americans as such?" I asked.

"Nothing of that sort was ever shown towards me," she returned. "The critics were wonderfully kind. It was a case of 'What can you do?' and then instant commendation for what they considered good work."

"I wish you would tell me something of the inception of your song 'The Year's at the Spring,'" I said. "It has always interested me to know just how that came to be written."

"It was rather strange," Mrs. Beach began. "You see, the Boston Browning Society were going to celebrate Browning's birthday, and they asked me to write a setting for Pippa's song in 'Pippa Passes.' Well, I was tremendously busy at the time, preparing to play one of my works with the Kneisel Quartet, among other things, so some weeks passed before I could 'get around to it.' I was on the train going down to New York, only a few days from the time when I promised the music, and the theme of it came to me there. I had no writing materials with me, and so I went

Her Most Famous Song, "The Year's at the Spring," Composed on Train Journey—May Write an Opera for Marcella Craft Some Day

over and over it in my mind—learned my own composition by heart, so to speak, and as soon as I got to New York wrote it down in twenty minutes. That, practically unchanged, was the song I gave them."

"I don't suppose any song ever enjoyed more widespread popularity among cultivated people," I said.

Tribute from Browning's Son

"It has been liked," she admitted modestly. "Among all the commendation I received for it, that of the poet's son I perhaps value most. The younger Robert Browning told a friend: 'Mrs. Beach's setting is not a song—it is a marriage of words and music.' Yes, I am very happy to have done that piece of work."

"Shall you ever write operas?" I asked.

Her face lit up. It is a most expressive one, by the way, and her blue eyes talk out of it very winningly.

"How did you know about that?" she smiled. "If you looked among all that manuscript in my trunk in the hold, it's quite possible you might find some beginnings along that line. I want very much to write an opera some day and hear Miss Craft sing in it. That would be work worth while."

"But you are going to play a good deal this Winter?"

"I am booked for at least thirty concerts after January first," Mrs. Beach said. "My manager wanted me to arrange for fifty, but I want to accomplish so much else that there is not enough time in one day now for all I have planned. On my concert tour I shall go all the way to the Pacific Coast, for I am most anxious to see that beautiful American country. My heart aches to leave Germany and all my friends there in such awful distress, but I love my own land well, and shall be glad to be in it again. If I only knew about some of my European friends—Mme. Carreño, for instance—who I fear may be in danger. It rends my heart to think of what they are all suffering."

When she spoke thus one knew what her charm was. It was the sympathy, the big loving kindness of her, going out far beyond her own immediate concerns, and revealing her not only as a noted composer, but as a kindly and charming woman.

Concert Debuts at Century

In the Century Opera concert of last Sunday Helen Stanley and Augusta Lenska made their first appearances in these events. Miss Stanley gave proof of her distinct gifts as a concert singer, delivering *Lia's* aria from Debussy's "L'Infant Prodigue" with splendid artistic grasp, and delighting the hearers with her added "That's the World in June" of Charles Gilbert Spross and Landon Ronald's "Down in the Forest." Miss Lenska won a recall with the Franz "Im Herbst," sung in English. Thomas Chalmers, a warm favorite, supplemented his "Dio Possente" with "Leezie Lindsay" and Homer's "Uncle Rome." High was the enthusiasm for Orville Harrold's "Ridi Pagliaccio" and "La donne è mobile," and Alfred Kaufman added "Tiefen Neller" to his spirited Catalogue Aria from "Don Giovanni." Hardy Williamson, Elizabeth Campbell, Hugo Riesenfeld, Alexander Smallens and Josef Pasternack also contributed to the success of the program. K. S. C.

Arthur Hinton's Trio, for piano, violin and 'cello, will have its first hearing in this country at the concert of the Adele Margulies Trio in Aeolian Hall, New York, November 18. A piano quintet by the noted English composer was given with much success by the Kneisels last season, Katharine Goodson, Mr. Hinton's wife, playing the piano part. Other works to be done by the Margulies Trio during the present year include Gottlieb Noren's Trio in D Minor, op. 28; Klengel's Sonata in B Minor for piano and 'cello, op. 23; Saint-Saën's Trio in E Minor, Dvorak's Piano Quintet in A, Mendelssohn's Trio in C Minor and Rubinstein's in G Minor.