

AMY BEACH: THE VICTORIAN WOMAN, THE AUTISM SPECTRUM, AND
COMPOSITIONAL STYLE

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COMPOSITIONAL STYLE

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Chapter One: Introduction

Celebrated American composer and pianist Amy Marcy Cheney Beach (1867-1944) became the subject of the dedicated interest of a number of scholars during the last decades of the twentieth century, but her idiosyncratic behavior and compositional style traits have not yet been analyzed in terms of a possible neurological condition. The prolific Beach, who achieved celebrity in the United States and Europe during her career, is generally regarded as “the first American woman to succeed as a composer of large-scale art music”¹ and has been singled out as “the most talented” member of the Second New England School of composers.² Her place in the historical narrative of American music is secure.³

And yet Beach represents a conundrum for listeners and students of her work. She arguably possessed all of the cognitive and talent-based dispositions for greatness, along with advantageous professional associations early in her life and ideal social status during her prime, but she is not regarded among the “great” figures in Western music. Flourishing at a time when women were beginning to be recognized in musical circles beyond the domestic sphere, she might have helped shape the future of American music, but there is little evidence for such an

¹ Adrienne Fried Block, “Beach, Amy Marcy (Cheney),” *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music*, 4 vols., ed. H. Wiley Hitchcock and Stanley Sadie (New York: Macmillan, 1984), I, 164.

² Michael Broyles, “Art Music from 1860 to 1920,” *The Cambridge History of American Music*, ed. David Nicholls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 241.

³ See, for example, J. Peter Burkholder, Donald Jay Grout, and Claude Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 7th ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 749. See also Richard Crawford, “Two Famous Bostonians: George W. Chadwick and Amy Beach,” *An Introduction to America’s Music* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 214-26.

argument.⁴ Instead, she is remembered for Brahmsian melodies, romantic sentimentality, early acceptance by male colleagues, and breaking through the barricade of traditional sexism. Her compositional language is typically understood as derivative, yet “marked by individuality.”⁵ What seems wanting is a fundamental originality. Appreciating the life of Amy Beach in the light of an autism spectrum disorder⁶ may shed light on the highly polished imitation of style and the high level of craftsmanship found in her scores as well as other compositional preferences and mannerisms.

It has become common since the 1990s, although controversially so, to examine historical figures in a psychological light, notably in terms of an ASD. ASDs, which include pervasive development disorders (PDD) and Asperger’s syndrome, encompass a wide array of abilities, disabilities, and behaviors exhibited by those individuals with this atypicality.⁷ Many descriptions of Beach’s early and late behaviors seem to coincide with symptoms associated with high-functioning autism or Asperger’s syndrome, which differs from classic autism in that the intelligence quotient is average or above average and there is no instance of a language delay in early childhood. ASD’s are neurological in nature; that is, the brain is essentially wired differently at birth instead of later experiencing a physiologically altering

⁴ Judith Tick, “Passed Away Is the Piano Girl,” *Women Making Music*, ed. Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 325.

⁵ Adrienne Fried Block, *Amy Beach: Passionate Victorian* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 298. There are many references in various studies to this aspect of Beach’s compositions.

⁶ Hereafter: ASD

⁷ Terminology related to the autism spectrum and its application remain controversial, as some experts and political advocates seek to remove the terms “Asperger’s syndrome” and “High-Functioning Autism” due to inherent discrepancies in diagnosis as well as their social stigma. For the purposes of this document, I have attempted to remain neutral on the subject, referring to the autism spectrum and Asperger’s syndrome interchangeably.

trauma. In 1991, the formulation of a spectrum of related behaviors was developed to replace a system of categorization.⁸

As the disciplines of psychology and neurology reach new heights of discovery regarding the human brain and expressions of creativity, musicologists have begun to re-examine known assumptions relating to the compositional process, sociological issues, and the very lifestyles and social interactions of many revered figures. For example, the lives of such composers and performers as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791), Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827), Blind Tom Wiggins (1849-1908), Erik Satie (1866-1925), Béla Bartók (1881-1945), and Glenn Gould (1932-1982) have been reconsidered in this light.⁹ Although a post-mortem diagnosis in the psychological and neurological realms must always remain unverified, one can draw logical conclusions based on anecdotal reports recorded by the subjects themselves, by family members, and by friends and associates.

⁸ See Simon Baron-Cohen, *The Facts: Autism and Asperger's Syndrome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 15-28.

⁹ Michael Fitzgerald, *The Genesis of Artistic Creativity: Asperger's Syndrome and the Arts* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2005), 149-202. See also, Catherine H.M. Fung, "Asperger's and Musical Creativity: The Case of Erik Satie," *Personality and Individual Differences* XLVI (2009) 755-83. For information on Blind Tom Wiggins, see Stephanie Jensen-Moulton, "Finding Autism in the Compositions of a 19th-Century Prodigy: Reconsidering "Blind Tom" Wiggins," *Sounding Off: Theorizing Disability in Music* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 199-215.

Literature Survey

Studies of Beach's music have increased dramatically since the first dissertation in 1963.¹⁰ The current major study is *Amy Beach: Passionate Victorian* by Adrienne Fried Block, who has contributed many other book chapters and articles.¹¹ Two other essential sources are *Amy Beach and Her Chamber Music* by Jeanell Wise Brown¹² and *The Remarkable Mrs. Beach, American Composer* by Walter S. Jenkins.¹³ Especially helpful are the many articles written by Beach herself for contemporary American music periodicals such as *The Etude*, *The Musician*, and *The Musical Courier*. Her perfunctory pocket diary entries, along with letters composed by her colleagues and friends, are highly relevant.¹⁴ At the crux of my Asperger's argument is the twelve-page, handwritten biography by Beach's mother, Clara Cheney, who chronicled the eccentric childhood behavior of her daughter and surrounding events; this document is dated 26 February 1892, when Beach was twenty-five-years old.¹⁵

Due to the ever-changing status of the responses to the subject, I have chosen to focus primarily on those texts addressing the autism spectrum published within the past decade. Eminent scholar Simon Baron-Cohen of the Autism Research

¹⁰ Lindsey E. Merrill, *Mrs. H.H.A. Beach: Her Life and Music* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Rochester, 1963).

¹¹ Block, *Amy Beach*, 1998.

¹² Jeanell Wise Brown, *Amy Beach and Her Chamber Music: Biography, Documents, Style* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1994).

¹³ Walter S. Jenkins, *The Remarkable Mrs. Beach, American Composer: A Biographical Account Based on Her Diaries, Letters, Newspaper Clippings, and Personal Reminiscences*, ed. John H. Brown (Warren, MI: Harmonie Park Press, 1994). Jenkins (1892-1990), organist, conductor, composer, and teacher, befriended Beach while both were in residence at the MacDowell Colony around 1915.

¹⁴ The diaries and letters are among the holdings in the Milne Special Collections at the University of New Hampshire Library.

¹⁵ Clara Cheney, *Biography of Amy Beach* [handwritten manuscript] (Washington D.C.: MacDowell Colony Papers, Library of Congress, 26 February 1892).

Centre and the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Cambridge has published the most concise text: *Autism and Asperger's Syndrome*.¹⁶ He has also written the foremost study dealing with the difference between the disorder's manifestation in men and women: *The Essential Difference: Male and Female Brains and the Truth about Autism*.¹⁷ In this work Baron-Cohen describes two different brain types: the "systemizing" brain (the "S" brain) and the "empathizing" brain (the "E" brain).¹⁸ He is also a contributor to the newly published text in the Medical Psychiatry Series titled *Asperger's Disorder*.¹⁹ Controversy regarding his categorization of the "S" brain as typically male and the "E" brain as predominately female is refuted by psychologist Cordelia Fine in her book, *Delusions of Gender: How Our Minds, Society, and Neurosexism Create Difference*.²⁰

The autism spectrum as it relates to great artists and writers is the subject of the work of Michael Fitzgerald, Henry March Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at Trinity College in Dublin. Fitzgerald is a widely known authority with over 120 publications to his credit. In *The Genesis of Artistic Creativity*²¹ he has profiled some of Western music's greatest composers and performers and credits symptoms of Asperger's syndrome as a factor in their creative output. The newly published *Oxford Handbook of Music Psychology* contains information not only

¹⁶ Simon Baron-Cohen, *Autism and Asperger's Syndrome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹⁷ Simon Baron-Cohen, *The Essential Difference* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1-4.

¹⁹ Jeffery Rausch, Maria Johnson, and Manuel Casanova, eds., *Asperger's Disorder* (New York: Informa Healthcare, 2008).

²⁰ Cordelia Fine, *Delusions of Gender: How Our Minds, Society, and Neurosexism Create Difference* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010).

²¹ Michael Fitzgerald. *The Genesis of Artistic Creativity*. (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2005)

regarding music and the brain but also regarding the typical learning patterns of musical children and the psychology behind improvisation and composition.²²

The field of musicology has also branched into disability studies, namely with Neil Lerner and Joseph Straus's compilation of research titled *Sounding Off: Theorizing Disability in Music*.²³ Because autism is a neurological disorder or abnormality, that is, one is born with a brain that atypically functions, it is important to understand some of the neurological workings behind music and the human being's processing of such aural information, as explained in *The Cognitive Neuroscience of Music*, edited by Isabelle Peretz and Robert Zatorre.²⁴

Personal accounts of those currently functioning on the autism spectrum are invaluable to this study. One appreciates immediately the frank, directed writing style of all subjects examined, a trait recognized as a function of autism.²⁵ Many of these writers also explain how they process music and musical ideas. Visual artist Peter Myers's short, art-filled book, written with Baron-Cohen and Sally Wheelwright, *An Exact Mind: An Artist with Asperger's Syndrome* provides a window into the exacting and precise nature of an Asperger mind.²⁶ Baron-Cohen writes of Myers's uncanny understanding of systems, which is conspicuously apparent in the systematic artwork of its maker.²⁷ In his memoir *Look Me in the Eye: My Life with*

²² Susan Hallam, Ian Cross, and Michael Thaut, *The Oxford Handbook of Music Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

²³ Neil Lerner and Joseph N. Straus., eds., *Sounding Off: Theorizing Disability in Music* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

²⁴ Isabelle Peretz and Robert Zatorre, eds., *The Cognitive Neuroscience of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 79-126. See especially "Part Two: The Musical Mind."

²⁵ I recognize that many of these narratives have been co-written by non-autistic writers.

²⁶ Peter Myers, Simon Baron-Cohen, and Sally Wheelwright, *An Exact Mind: An Artist with Asperger's Syndrome*, (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2004) 72-73.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

Asperger's, John Elder Robison gives the reader an intimate glance into his own understanding of the systematic nature of electronic sound amplification and pyrotechnics.²⁸

²⁸ John Elder Robison, *Look Me in the Eye: My Life with Asperger's* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2008).

Methodology and Overview

Understanding that a posthumous diagnosis must always remain open to question and be unverifiable, I intend to examine details of Beach's behavior and aspects of her compositions according to potential markers of Asperger's syndrome. In order to present a well balanced argument, I have devoted a chapter to exploring social and cultural history during her lifetime. The psychological developments that occurred around the turn of the century undoubtedly influenced American cultural views.

As a prelude to presenting evidence related to Beach's childhood and adult actions, an overview of Asperger's syndrome and the autism spectrum is provided. I will examine four current theories regarding this condition, as these become relevant evidence when I discuss the composer's music and compositional style. Because the autism spectrum is generally associated with men due to the exacerbated and noticeable nature of their behavior in relation to females, I will address these differences and point out how certain autism spectrum behavioral traits manifest themselves in women.²⁹

Using the accounts of Beach's mother but also later close friends, I intend to correlate certain behavioral traits with those occurring in individuals currently diagnosed with an ASD. Many regard Mrs. Cheney's control of her daughter's performances and the composer's marriage to her fairly traditionally-minded

²⁹ One should note that some argue that there is no inherent difference between the male and female brain, but that gender roles and behaviors are completely a manifestation of intense socialization. For the purposes of this document, I will remain neutral on the subject; however, it is important to recognize the fact that Beach was socialized in a highly feminine manner during her time.

husband critically detrimental moves to her career. Given my own suppositions, I nonetheless intend to interpret her relationships, especially those that made her career such a success, as favorable on some level.

In the remainder of my study I will focus on selected compositions. Each piece exhibits compositional attributes that have been linked to autism-like traits. Like many autism spectrum individuals with special abilities, Beach was from an early age a spectacular memorizer, which is revealed as learned melodies appear in her early piano works, such as the song for voice and piano titled *The Rainy Day* (1880). Although the melody bears remarkable similarity to a popular Beethoven piano sonata, this piece alone is insufficient to prove a pervasive compositional pattern. Scholar Adrienne Fried Block writes of the similarity of Beach's Mass in E-Flat (1890) to Cherubini's *Deuxième messe solennelle* in D major (1811).³⁰ The similarities between Beach's *Ballad*, Op. 6 (1894), and Chopin's famous G-minor *Ballade* (1835) will also be noted to show the continuation of this pattern.

The second group of works reflect natural themes, such as animals, trees, or birdsong, and the literal aural depictions of such elements. Since obsessions with these topics, as well as with storms and other outdoor phenomenon, are typical of those on the autism spectrum, it is important to examine these like items. Beach also seemed to be quite concerned with the subject of flight in different creatures of nature. She was an avid collector of birdsong and published regarding the subject.³¹ Literal and fairly consistent musical descriptions can also be observed in selected pieces, such as the piano works *The Hermit Thrush at Morn* (1921), *The Hermit*

³⁰ Block, *Amy Beach*, 64-69.

³¹ Amy Beach, "Bird Songs" *The Designer* (New York: Standard Fashion Co., May 1911).

Thrush at Eve (1921), and the second movement from *Summer Dreams*, Op 47.

Although one may attribute such natural associations and depictions with Beach's heavy Romantic influence, it is important to remember that the composer showed a particular interest and notable reaction to natural elements as a small child. Such evidence indicates that this fascination stemmed from a natural tendency instead of her cultural social surroundings.

The last group of pieces selected display Beach's musical portrayal of national traditions, which she incorporated with a degree of literality often associated with Asperger's syndrome. As composers in the United States were searching to define a distinctly "American" sound in their fine art music, Beach was responding to this movement in her own way. Through these pieces, one can observe Beach's exacting interpretation of not only nationalist themes, but of a specific country's cultivated musical language, most notably that of Germany and France. For instance, the art song *Der Totenkranz*, Op. 73 (1914) provides a stark contrast in compositional systems and displays her comprehension of the Germanic writing style, while in *Suite Française*, Op. 65 (1907), she borrows from the popular French Impressionist tradition. The *Gaelic Symphony* (1897), however, demonstrates Beach's literality to the greatest extent. In this regard, Adrienne Fried Block has made a strong argument of the relationship between Beach's symphony and the *New World Symphony* by the Czech master Antonín Dvořák.³² Beach's approach to composition in these works reflects the borrowing of systems as well, a trait also associated with an ASD.

³² See Block, *Amy Beach*, 88-90.

Chapter Two: Defining the Autism Spectrum Condition

Autism research is a progressing field of psychiatric study. As late as 1991, such conditions as autism, high-functioning autism, and Asperger's syndrome were placed on a gradated scale or spectrum. The "Autism Spectrum"³³ is inexact, yet it indicates the diversity and wide range of characteristics exhibited by those individuals diagnosed with autism. Many consider the autism spectrum not as a mental illness but, rather, an alternative way that the brain functions. Certainly such a diagnosis complicates the lives of those with autism trying to interact with the neuro-typical population, but to be categorized as mentally ill due to trauma or other external factors is an incorrect assumption. Many people who have forms of high-functioning autism appear typical and operate quite normally within their own communities.

While numerous lists of autism and Asperger traits have been compiled, the current *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* remains the definitive diagnostic tool for those in the field of psychology.³⁴ The requirements for a modern day diagnosis of an autistic disorder read as such:

- (I.) A total of six (or more) items from (A), (B), and (C), with at least two from (A), and one each from (B) and (C)
 - (A) qualitative impairment in social interaction, as manifested by at least two of the following:
 1. marked impairments in the use of multiple nonverbal behaviors such as eye-to-eye gaze, facial expression, body posture, and gestures to regulate social interaction

³³ Dr. Lorna Wing was the first to propose a spectrum design for recognizing autism. See Simon Baron-Cohen, *Autism and Asperger Syndrome*, 21-22.

³⁴ American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual or Mental Disorders: DSM-IV*, (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Hereafter: *DSM-IV*.

2. failure to develop peer relationships appropriate to developmental level
3. a lack of spontaneous seeking to share enjoyment, interests, or achievements with other people, (e.g., by a lack of showing, bringing, or pointing out objects of interest to other people)
4. lack of social or emotional reciprocity³⁵

(B) qualitative impairments in communication as manifested by at least one of the following:

1. delay in, or total lack of, the development of spoken language (not accompanied by an attempt to compensate through alternative modes of communication such as gesture or mime)
2. in individuals with adequate speech, marked impairment in the ability to initiate or sustain a conversation with others
3. stereotyped and repetitive use of language or idiosyncratic language
4. lack of varied, spontaneous make-believe play or social imitative play appropriate to developmental level

(C) restricted repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests and activities, as manifested by at least two of the following:

1. encompassing preoccupation with one or more stereotyped and restricted patterns of interest that is abnormal either in intensity or focus
2. apparently inflexible adherence to specific, nonfunctional routines or rituals
3. stereotyped and repetitive motor mannerisms (e.g., hand or finger flapping or twisting, or complex whole-body movements)
4. persistent preoccupation with parts of objects

(II) Delays or abnormal functioning in at least one of the following areas, with onset prior to age 3 years:

- (A) social interaction
- (B) language as used in social communication
- (C) symbolic or imaginative play

(III) The disturbance is not better accounted for by Rett's Disorder or Childhood Disintegrative Disorder³⁶

Each team of psychologists must make a diagnosis using these guidelines;

individuals, however, can exhibit autistic tendencies without formal *DSM-IV*

³⁵ The *DSM-IV* gives the following as examples: not actively participating in simple social play or games, preferring solitary activities, or involving others in activities only as tools or "mechanical" aids.

³⁶ Reproduced from *DSM-IV* Criteria

diagnosis. The field is also progressing and improving definitive guidelines. In a press release dated 10 February 2010, new proposals for the *DSM-V* include:

The recommended *DSM-5* draft criteria for autism spectrum disorders include a new assessment of symptom severity related to the individual's degree of impairment. The draft criteria also specify deficits in two categories: 1) social interaction and communication (e.g., maintaining eye-to-eye gaze, ability to sustain a conversation and peer-relations) and 2) the presence of repetitive behaviors and fixated interests and behaviors. Additionally, in recognition of the neurodevelopmental nature of the disorder, the criteria require that symptoms begin in early childhood. Clinicians must take into account an individual's age, stage of development, intellectual abilities and language level in making a diagnosis.³⁷

The standing of such diagnostic requirements is related to political movements and the appeasement of advocacy groups, but generally such changes are expected as more research studies are conducted with modern sensibilities.

Five current theories related to the cause of ASDs remain within current psychological thought. Simon Baron-Cohen outlines each of these theories in his book, *Autism and Asperger Syndrome*: Executive dysfunction theory, weak central coherence theory, mindblindness theory, empathizing-systemizing theory, and magnocellular theory. Each of these theories explains various aspects of the condition, although none of them are all-encompassing. The theories, however, do coincide with aspects of the spectrum that are specific to artistic creation and aspects of music that may be labeled as autistic traits.

Executive dysfunction theory, as defined by Baron-Cohen, is the ability to control one's own actions. Much in the way that someone suffers from the "ticks" of Turret's Syndrome, one with an ASD cannot specifically control certain motor

³⁷ Beth Casteel and Jaime Valora, "DSM-5 Proposed Revisions Include New Category of Autism Spectrum Disorders," News Release, American Psychiatric Association, 10 February 2010.

functions, attention, and even their own thoughts.³⁸ This theory surmises that the prefrontal cortex has not developed normally and thus explains the inability to shift one's attention and the repetitive behaviors which are classic symptoms of an ASD. Baron-Cohen believes that there are certain weaknesses associated with this theory but that it may account for the aforementioned symptoms.³⁹

The weak central coherence theory refers to a person's inability to collect details and integrate said facts into a cohesive whole picture. Those with an ASD are commonly focused on details, to the point that the importance of the greater whole is minimized or lost altogether. Such signs of a weak central coherence often surface in the work of modern-day visual artists on the autism spectrum. This theory accounts for the video-like visual playback of one event to another.⁴⁰ Echolalia, the direct repetition of spoken words or a phrase in exact rhythmic pattern, is also considered to be the manifestation of a desire for central coherence.⁴¹ The same sort of repetition can be seen in the music of Amy Beach, especially in her early works and incorporation of bird calls. Baron-Cohen also states that this theory can account for sensory hypersensitivity, a trait which also affected the composer.⁴²

The third theory states that children and adults with autism and Asperger's syndrome suffer from a delayed or non-existent development of a theory of mind. One's theory of mind allows an individual to predict or make sense of another

³⁸ Baron-Cohen. *Autism and Asperger Syndrome*. 52.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁴⁰ Temple Grandin, *Thinking in Pictures*, New York: Vintage Books, 2006. Joseph Straus refers to this also as "local coherence." Joseph Straus, "Autism as Culture," 542-3.

⁴¹ Straus, "Autism As Culture," 543.

⁴² Baron-Cohen, *Autism and Asperger's Syndrome*, 56.

person's actions or behavior and then act or respond appropriately to a given situation. Baron-Cohen calls this the "mindblindness" theory due to the fact that those with an ASD cannot intuitively read a social situation or other person's behavior.⁴³ For instance, a person may indicate that he or she wants to leave by looking at the door. A person with an ASD may not recognize such a non-verbal signal.

This type of mindblindness extends to language in that many with an ASD will always interpret conversations in a very literal manner. Baron-Cohen explains that a phrase such as "We'll cross that bridge when we get there" may conjure a physical image of a bridge in the mind of one with ASD.⁴⁴ In fact, one with such a condition might interpret the saying literally, fully expecting to cross a bridge or wondering why someone is discussing bridges at a certain time. This theory surmises that the brain has not developed the ability to intuitively read another person's facial expressions, varied vocal tones, or abstract allusions. Several instances of the literal extreme occur in the composer's anecdotal reports of her social interactions.

The fourth theory Baron-Cohen titles the "empathizing-systemizing theory," which explains the condition as a deficit in empathy and an overly active systemizing brain.⁴⁵ Baron-Cohen writes that "Systemizing is the drive to analyze or construct systems. These might be any kind of system. What defines the system is that it follows *rules*, and when we systemize we are trying to identify the rules that

⁴³Ibid., 57.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Baron-Cohen, *The Essential Difference*, 133-154.

govern the system, in order to predict how that system will behave.”⁴⁶ Not only are the more obvious systems, such as car engines or a train calendar, at the ready disposal for the systemizing brain, but abstract concepts, such as musical notation and language can be broken down for analysis. Social systems as well, such as a management hierarchy or a social caste system, is very easily understood by the “S” brain.⁴⁷

Baron-Cohen uses the terms “systemizing” and “empathizing” to describe the average nature of the male vs. the female brain, the former corresponding to the systemizing brain and the latter being the naturally empathizing brain. In his book, *The Essential Difference*, Baron-Cohen describes autism as a condition of the extreme male brain.⁴⁸ It is important also to consider the differing opinions of psychologist Cordelia Fine as her research indicates that gender differences are a function of socialization rather than based in a biological cause.⁴⁹ Fine continually reports that the physical numbers of men operating with a systemizing brain is equal to the number of women possessing the same qualities, and that it is an error in gender suggestion and lack of social motivation that produces the gender skew in most studies.⁵⁰

Because of this controversy, a few facts will be assumed for this study. Amy Beach lived at a time and within a culture that heavily imprinted rules for social behavior appropriate for women and men. Beach would have been expected to

⁴⁶ Baron-Cohen, *Autism and Asperger's Syndrome*, 63.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Baron-Cohen, *The Essential Difference*, 133-154.

⁴⁹ Cordelia Fine, *Delusions of Gender: How our Minds, Society, and Neurosexism Create Difference*, (New York: W. W. Norton and Company), 15.

⁵⁰ Fine, *Delusions of Gender*, 22-23.

behave in a feminine manner despite her biological brain type and would have been heavily socialized to do so as her personal success and survival depended on conforming to the rules of her society. Whether her outward feminine behavior was caused by a biological or social imprint is less important to this study than the manifestation of her writing tendencies and her success as a composer within a male dominated career field.

Chapter Three: Historical Context

An Overview of Beach's Life

Born Amy Marcy Cheney in West Henniker, New Hampshire, Beach has traditionally been portrayed as leading a simple, Congregationalist or Calvinist-influenced childhood devoid of earthly or sensual indulgences. This included music in the earliest of the child's years, as well as an emphasis on modesty.⁵¹ The young musician was raised according to nineteenth-century social expectations for those of the female gender. Barbara Harris describes such expectations as a combination of four beliefs: 1) there is to be "a sharp dichotomy between the home and the economic world outside of the home that paralleled a sharp contrast between female and male natures," 2) "the designation of the home as the female's only proper sphere," 3) "the moral superiority of woman," and 4) "the idealization of her function as mother."⁵² These attributes clearly describe the sphere and operating power of the true woman at her height of the Victorian era.

While Beach showed great promise in her musical abilities as a child, her mother Clara was determined that young Amy "was to be a musician, not a prodigy."⁵³ This belief was to affect Beach's career throughout not only her childhood but also through her married life and beyond. Clara Cheney assumed primary responsibilities for her daughter's education and also served as her daughter's first piano teacher. The composer married Dr. Henry H. A. Beach (1843-1910), a well-known Boston surgeon and a friend of her father's, in 1885.

⁵¹ Block, *Amy Beach*, 6.

⁵² Barbara Harris, *Beyond Her Sphere: Women and the Professions in American History*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978) 33.

⁵³ Block, *Amy Beach*, 7.

It is a widely known and accepted assumption that after her marriage to Dr. Beach, her performance opportunities were significantly limited due to her husband's wishes. Beach's first duty was to function as a wife and matron in Boston society. Many authors have indicated that Dr. Beach insisted his wife act according to her new status, which included never teaching piano lessons or receiving a monetary stipend for her performances. Rather, Dr. Beach wished his wife only to play for charitable events, probably because it would have reflected poorly on his own ability to provide for his household as was expected of a husband of his social caste. Thus, the new "Mrs. H. H. A. Beach" would have to comply with society's expectations, specifically Boston society's expectations, of proper marital behavior. The city of Boston, however, was widely known for its progressive outlook, and the upper class Boston woman did not lead a life full of household drudgery and child rearing. Rather, these women's lives "consisted of letter writing and household duties in the morning, lunch with guests, afternoon visiting to various other women's homes, charity work or club meetings, ... dinner with her husband at another couple's home and then attendance at the Symphony concert."⁵⁴ High art and culture also played an important role in the lives of these women.⁵⁵ Many of the social events that were planned and executed by Boston's female elite, centered on intellectual, musical, literary, and artistic growth and experience and played an integral part in men's economic and social pursuits. One can only assume that this

⁵⁴ Laurie K. Blunsom, *Gender, Genre, and Professionalism: The Songs of Clara Rogers, Helen Hopekirk, Amy Beach, Margaret Lang, and Mabel Daniels, 1880-1925* (Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 1999) 30.

⁵⁵ For more information on the musician's role in Boston society, see Blunsom, *Gender, Genre, and Professionalism*, 11-37.

lifestyle allowed Beach time to write and practice and thus played an integral and probably vital role in her ability to succeed as a composer and pianist.

In the years 1910 and 1911, Beach suffered the loss of her husband and mother respectively. At the age of forty-four, the composer finally had the opportunity to travel to Europe for a concert tour and collaboration with other musicians. She returned to the United States in 1914, due to the outbreak of World War I.⁵⁶ Boston greeted her with enthusiasm, although the city's former school of composers had long since died or left the area.⁵⁷ Beach moved to New York in 1915 to begin the second phase of her life.

In 1921, Beach accepted an invitation by longtime friend and colleague Marion MacDowell to become a fellow at the MacDowell Colony artist retreat. Block writes of the aging composer's difficulties encountered, quoting artist Prentiss Taylor, "Reportedly everyone [at the Colony] was fond of her, some a touch patronizingly, because she (or her work or both) [was] no longer fashionable."⁵⁸ Beach largely ignored such behavior by her fellow colonists, due to her "sense of her own worth."⁵⁹ Certainly the composer had encountered gender prejudices before this time; however, Beach had been very sheltered from such situations involving an attack on her personality. Such an event is not surprising, given the cultural changes which culminated in the 1920s.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 223.

⁵⁹ Taylor, qtd. in Block, *Amy Beach*, 223.

Social Climate

Beach was uniquely privileged to live through one of the most turbulent times in American cultural history, especially to the famed Victorian icons of her geographic region. The social atmosphere in which the composer matured into young adulthood and beyond, especially regarding the woman's changing place within the private and public sphere, certainly affected Beach's perception of her societal roll. The shifting expectations in human behavior would most likely have placed anyone operating on the autism spectrum at a striking social disadvantage when compared to the ridged rules that governed Victorian customs and ideals.

Attempting to determine the exact culture in which Beach experienced her childhood, married life, and widowhood presents problematic issues for the researcher. The consideration of her environment, however, is of the utmost importance when attempting to draw a psychological analog based on various accounts. The composer was raised in a moderately conservative Congregationalist household. Although Block makes continual reference to the stern nature of Beach's mother, one cannot ignore that some of the composer's family members were music performers and promising artists. Beach's Aunt (Emma) "Franc" Clement, the sister of Clara Cheney, was successful as a singer in the San Francisco area, and she also allowed her daughter Ethel to study art in Paris, twice leaving her husband at home while she traveled with Ethel.⁶⁰ Clara's older sister was married to banker who eventually became the chief clerk of the United States Mint, and the family led a life

⁶⁰ Block, *Amy Beach*, 19-20.

much more luxurious than one would expect of those raised as strict Congregationalists.⁶¹

Beach was born in rural New Hampshire, into a society which reflected the values of Victorian America. This traditional society constrained not only women, but men as well. Strictly defined social rules governed daily human interaction in a very systematic manner. Men and women worked in two decidedly different “spheres.” The imperial mother trained her daughters in the art of homemaking, childrearing, and caring for her future husband. The cult of true womanhood reigned supreme, as women were most often expected to function as self-sacrificing servants to their families. The male sphere consisted of the business world and work outside the home, while the woman’s home was the place of sentiments and love. She was required to provide a peaceful resting place for her work-weary husband.⁶² America’s Victorian wife was constantly sacrificing her own desires for those of her family. Each sex denied itself of earthly and sexual pleasures as Victorian society saw fit.

The Republican Party emerged touting its demands for free labor along with the exaltation of the hard working protestant “self-made man.” Block points to several aspects of Dr. Henry H. A. Beach’s life and persona that place him in this category praised by Victorian men and women who ascribed to such an ideal. Dr. Beach did not come from a wealthy family; thus, in order to put himself through

⁶¹ Block, *Amy Beach*, 19.

⁶² Nancy M. Theriot, *Mothers and Daughters in Nineteenth-Century America* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1996) 35.

college and medical school at Harvard, he had to earn his own money to pay for the tuition.⁶³

In New England, specifically, traveling Congregationalist ministers had a significant impact on the idea that men and woman could be separated into reasoning and sentimental spheres respectively. Women were not thought to possess the capability for rational thought and, therefore, considered unable to operate outside of the home. Composing music, according to pervasive nineteenth-century thought, was the product of reason, and therefore women were not seen as capable of music composition. George Upton's 1886 comment leaves us with the Victorian sense of woman's compositional capabilities:

Her [woman's] grandest performances have been in the regions of romance, of imagination, of intuition, of poetical feeling and expression, or in those still higher duties which call for the exercise of "faith and works." For these and many other reasons growing out of the peculiar organization of woman, the sphere in which she moves, the training which she receives, and the duties she has to fulfil [sic], it does not seem that woman will ever originate music in its fullest and grandest harmonic forms. She will always be the recipient and interpreter, but there is little hope she will be the creator."⁶⁴

Upton's comment regarding the "peculiar organization of woman" reflects the common assumption that the woman's body and being was controlled by her reproductive system. The social ramifications for women performing music outside of the home were harsh, as they would immediately adopt the standing of a "painted woman" or a prostitute.⁶⁵

⁶³ Block, *Amy Beach*, 43.

⁶⁴ George P. Upton, *Woman in Music*, (Chicago, A. C. McClurg, 1892) 31.

⁶⁵ For more information, see Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

Certain social schisms began to appear during the postbellum years of the nineteenth century, especially in terms of the woman's position in society and in her family. As the Industrial Revolution began, men needed less assistance from their wives to operate the agricultural environment. This phenomenon, however, was more prevalent in the towns and cities, as urbanization took hold of American society. Goods and services formerly provided by wives were now the responsibility of immigrant workers and the enslaved. The rise of cutthroat capitalism in America's cities threatened the Victorian moral values.⁶⁶

Germ theory and Darwin's *Origin of Species* undermined general conventions regarding Victorian self control. Of course, strict self control had always been a part of daily discourse for men and women, but there was always an assumed sense of control over one's own destiny. Those who held dear the notion that diligence and Godly deference, would be unquestionably rewarded with life success were greatly disturbed by Darwin's Theory of Natural Selection. As the weak, passive men and women of the age began to grow dissatisfied and unconfident in their previous beliefs, the Social Gospel began to rise into mainstream values. Morone concludes, "By the turn of the century, many reformers found another voice. The Social Gospel movement pushed Christian duty toward public service rather than personal salvation. Love thy neighbor meant lift the poor."⁶⁷ Thus begins a greater historical trend away from Victorian individualism and inward focus, toward a collective centered society, one which requires highly refined skills of social interaction.

⁶⁶ James Morone, *Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) 220.

⁶⁷Morone, *Hellfire Nation*, 220.

Emergence of Psychology

The state of American Victorian work ethic and moral values was crumbling during Beach's married years, and thus historians have traced the emergence of modern psychological thought to this period of time. Although the entire concept of psychological forces impacting the actions of the self-controlled Victorian man or woman was completely antithetical to mainstream beliefs, Smith-Rosenberg characterizes mental conditions such as hysteria as a "classic disease of the nineteenth century."⁶⁸ The affliction of the upper classes, known as Neurasthenia, was given the title "Our National Malady" and the fatigued Victorian often retreated to his or her bed chamber for weeks in order to recover from a failing of the nerves.

Historians have recorded the emergence of "New Thought" coming out of the Christian Science movement. Figures such as Phineas P. Quimby⁶⁹ and his two prominent students, Mary Baker Eddy and Warren Felt Evans, began to canvas areas around New England promoting mind-cure techniques for mental and spiritual healing of the body and soul. These "New Thought" practitioners operated according to the moral codes of Christianity and Victorianism, despite their dissention in terms of self control of one's own actions. The techniques used by these pioneers actually began with Viennese doctor Franz Anton Mesmer (1734-

⁶⁸ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1985) 197.

⁶⁹ Phineas P. Quimby's writings actually did not become available to the general public until 1921.

1815) whose work with hypnosis served as the basis for New Thought performances and mind cures.⁷⁰

Pragmatist William James was at the forefront of those attempting to change America's social outlook, and in his 1890 book entitled *Principles of Psychology*, he coins the phrase "stream of consciousness" as his words attack Victorian belief in the innate moral sense of human beings and the mechanistic views of psychology.⁷¹ James believed that the religious experience was not relevant to a master deity, but that people had a "will to believe" which provided for them a psychological comfort rather than actual godly protection.

Sigmund Freud emerged not only as a leader in the development of modern psychology, but his impact on American culture is of incredible significance. Freud shocked society during the turn of the century with his 1917 writings on psychoanalysis. According to the scholar, there were three occurrences over the course of human history which challenged the collective psyche of humankind. When Copernicus (1473-1543) informed the world that the world was not, in fact, the center of the universe, but one of many planets, this served as the first shock to the human ego. Darwin's theory that the human was just one of the animal brethren destroyed Victorian's sense of higher being. In true Freudian spirit, he declared that the third shock to human society was his own proposition that individuals in fact

⁷⁰ Beryl Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) 50.

⁷¹ James, *Principles of Psychology*, 180.

were not in control of their own lives, but were influenced by the unconscious mind.⁷²

Beach showed signs of awareness of her cultural surroundings in her written words and articles published during America's great awakening. Block writes of the musician's development of the "veritable autobiography" as either occurring as a result of one's conscious or unconscious in the creation of it.⁷³ The composer was also greatly distressed at the change in musical styles and practices occurring during the early twentieth century. All accounts of her religious affiliations were heavily influenced by her parents or later, her husband; however, she was known to be a superstitious woman.⁷⁴

Modern-day psychology is a continuing evolution of scientific thought, study, and experience. The term "Autism Spectrum Disorder" is a relatively new phenomenon, as the term was coined by Lorna Wing in 1991.⁷⁵ The recognition of mental disorders in the United States dates back to the early nineteenth century, and even as early as the late eighteenth century in Europe. In many respects, historians cannot be concerned with the "correctness" of psychological thought in its budding stages, but it is useful to consider the spirit in which mental abnormalities or diversity was approached by historical psychological figures.

The Rise of Personality

⁷² Sigmund Freud, A Difficulty in the Path of Psychoanalysis. *Standard edition* (Vol. 22) London: Hogarth Press, 136-144.

⁷³ Block, *Amy Beach*, 132.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 290.

⁷⁵ Baron-Cohen, *Autism and Asperger's Syndrome*, 21.

Historians have long recognized the massive cultural shift at the end of the nineteenth century from Victorian societal rule, to a consumer-based country in which success depended on possessing a dynamic personality. The Victorian culture, however, did not completely cease to exist. In fact, it took almost thirty years for society to transition to consumerism as the predominate cultural norm.

With a large number of people conforming to 1920s mass culture, most historians agree that the topics of personality and success became intertwined. More specifically, having a dynamic personality became the key to high achievement. In Orsin Swett Marden's 1921 advice manual, the New Thought writer provides today's scholars with a historical account of such common practices and thought of his time. Marden addresses several aspects of a desirable personality, such as natural and acquired magnetism. "Call it aura, magnetism, or whatever you please, this indescribably, indefinable, mysterious, personal atmosphere is a tremendous power. It draws people to or drives them from us."⁷⁶ One's ability or inability to draw others in, as Marden states bluntly, "will affect your career."⁷⁷ Marden essentially informs his reader that the weak, neurasthenic Victorian man will not be successful in the business world. He states,

We all have felt the quickening of ambition, the subtle influence due to the active, forceful, positive vibrations which fill the atmosphere of the places of business of successful men. If a business office is dominated by a powerful personality, we feel the dominating force all through the establishment. If, on the other hand, the head of the concern is a weak, undecided, vacillating character, if he lacks force, energy, and push everyone who enters the place feels the negative vibration. . . . Nothing but weakness can come from a weak man, no matter how much he poses or tries to make a favorable impression.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Orsin Swett Marden, *Masterful Personality* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1921) 2.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

While statements such as these are quite indicative of the Teddy Roosevelt-inspired way of thinking, one can assume that a person operating with an autism spectrum brain might have difficulty or not be able to adapt to this new standard of living.

Developing a “masterful personality” in Marden’s perspective required a large amount of natural and projected empathy, the main trait in which the autism spectrum brain struggles. For instance, Marden suggests that when meeting another person for the first time, one should “put your heart into it. Grasp the hand as though you were glad to see the owner of it. Look him in the face, give him a smile from your heart. Let cordiality and geniality gleam in your face. Radiate good cheer. Give the stranger a generous welcome.”⁷⁹ Those on the autism spectrum would have difficulty with Marden’s suggestions, given their limitations in expressing themselves directly, into the eyes of others. Even so, one should note that instructions such as these would be extremely helpful to a society in which natural empathy was not previously valued.

New social graces were also forming outside of the Victorian vein, although manners still played a key role in personal interaction during the early twentieth century. Marden addresses such issues directly, stating, “There are multitudes of people with warm hearts that are thus encased in ice, so to speak, in their manners. Many lack tact. They are always saying the wrong thing, doing the wrong thing, making a false impression of what they really are.”⁸⁰ This social gregariousness is quite common among those on the spectrum, and thus it is fairly easy to imagine

⁷⁹ Ibid., 68.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 74.

one's dismissal when encountering one of the "uncouth" or "peculiar" of disposition.⁸¹ Whereas in previous times, a person on the autism spectrum could keep quiet or follow strict, learned rules of social interaction, the new type of personal discourse during this time required social skills based on intuition and empathy rather than a prescribed social system.

The possession of a persuasive, magnetic, and dynamic personality slowly became the new determinate for success in the post Victorian era. Instead of one's moral standing being judged by outward appearances and ability to follow strict etiquette rules, American society adopted a preference for intuitive social skills. Henri Laurent writes in his 1915 contribution to Funk and Wagnall's *Mental Efficiency Series* that "Moral energy is a great factor in the creation of a personality."⁸² The ability to self-reflect, "To acknowledge that the reason you hate some one [sic] is because you envy them, admit very frankly the folly of it, and reprimand oneself" is the greatest qualities to possess before developing a personality that will help one to succeed.⁸³

Women did not see as drastic of a social change as did men; however, Marden does point to evidence that the quiet, controlled Victorian woman had also fallen from favor in American society. "There are women who have no physical attractions and yet they have such charm of personality, such beauty of character, such grace of soul and poise of womanliness that everybody thinks of them as beautiful."⁸⁴

Although one might note that there had not been such a drastic change in the

⁸¹ Ibid., 80.

⁸² Henri Laurent, "Personality," *The Mental Efficiency Series* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1915) 30.

⁸³ Ibid, 30.

⁸⁴ Marden, *Masterful Personality*, 34.

expected behavior of women as was true for men, it does seem that social expectations changed in the realm of personality as well.

Marden almost perfectly describes autism spectrum behavior when he characterizes a woman with whom he was acquainted:

I know a woman with a fine mind and a most generous heart, who unconsciously antagonizes people by always doing or saying the wrong thing. She prides herself on her honesty and is very fearless and outspoken in her criticism. She is continually saying things that drive others away from her, and she makes an unfortunate impression on strangers, yet she is very kind and generous and will do anything in the world for those who need help or encouragement. She is the most accommodating woman I have ever met, yet she tries one's very soul by her repellent way of doing and saying things. She wants to, she longs to be popular, but people don't like her; she lives an *exclusive* life when she longs to live an *inclusive* one.⁸⁵

Women were not, of course, freed of the expectation for feminine behavior. The more powerful, sexy woman of the 1920s did overtake the pious Victorian matron, but masculine behavior was still considered unbecoming. When Amy Beach resided at the MacDowell colony, it was the first time that she was in contact with other artists, her peers, on a daily basis. It does not seem surprising that given the social climate, Beach's Victorian tendencies, and a possible autism spectrum diagnosis she encountered resistance to her music and her own personality.

Understanding present-day culture is of the utmost importance when considering the evolution of the autism spectrum. As previously mentioned, ASD tendencies have probably existed since the beginning of humanity. Autism is just as much a cultural issue as it is a neurological one. If today's culture had not developed into a society dependent on social norms and personal communication, those

⁸⁵ Ibid, 62. The traits of women on the autism spectrum will be discussed in further detail in chapter 2 of this document.

operating with ASDs may not have been singled out as needing assistance operating in society. Lennard J. Davis makes a rather poignant argument in his article “Constructing Normalcy” by simply stating that the word “normal” did not come into the English language by its present-day definition until the year 1840.⁸⁶ This manifestation of the word “normal” is not surprising given the Victorian Era’s emphasis on social rules and strict guidelines for acceptable behavior. Davis states “An important consequence of the idea of the norm is that it divides the total population into standard and nonstandard subpopulations. The next step in conceiving of the population as norm and non-norm is for the state to attempt to norm the nonstandard—the aim of eugenics.”⁸⁷

Eugenics, developed by Sir Francis Galton, cousin of Charles Darwin, was influential throughout the late nineteenth century and was adopted by Nazi Germany as a way of justifying the massive killing of those they deemed “defective” by genetic inheritance.⁸⁸ This social effort to separate the normal human being from the non-normal was roughly based on Darwin’s natural selection, using genetics to determine unfit individuals. Such efforts would set the precedent for the exploitation of anyone unable to conform to societal rules. By the early years of the twentieth century, society had determined that personality and interpersonal communication was paramount in order to achieve success. Thus, a stage had been set for those operating with an ASD to fail unless they found others to help them understand their own societal surroundings. The Victorian Era, with all of its social

⁸⁶ Lennard J. Davis, “Constructing Normalcy” *The Disability Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2010, 4.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 7.

⁸⁸ Davis, “Constructing Normalcy,” 11.

restrictions and prescribed rules for human interaction actually provides an ideal environment for those with a high functioning autism or Aspergers syndrome.

Amy Beach and Her Contextual History

The views of Dr. Beach and his contemporary physicians, such as Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr., probably aligned with transcendentalist practices of New Thought rather than pure Victorian values. Dr. Beach and Holmes were a generation older than the young composer; therefore it stands to reason that they would closely subscribe to the current practices of their own time. Holmes in 1843 would contend that doctors themselves could indeed carry illness from one patient to the next.⁸⁹ Such a revelation indicates the doctor's willingness to admit that contagions were indeed a manifestation of human action, rather than the absolute will of a deistic entity. Evidence suggests that Holmes was a progressive thinker, and given his associations with the literary Dante Club and the arts-centered St. Botolph club that his progressive attitude extended beyond medicine.

Holmes and Dr. Beach's close association with figures such as William Dean Howells, suggest that both men were naturally born in the Victorian mindset, although these figures certainly had progressive leanings. These men would have been the first to be affected by Darwin's theories, but also probably the first to accept such findings. In any case, the new Mrs. H. H. A. Beach probably was not as subjugated to her husband's command as previously thought. In fact, all evidence shows that Dr. Beach was more concerned with his wife's outward appearance, the

⁸⁹ See Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Contagiousness of Perpetual Fever" *The British Medical Journal*, I/503, 1843.

reason for her rather conservative publication name, as opposed to their daily living reality. Amy Beach was only required to compose and was exempt from many functional household duties. Block states that, "Even during her long widowhood, she rejected a domestic role for herself, establishing a coterie of helpers who willingly took care of her practical needs so that she might concentrate on her work."⁹⁰ Although the composer would often write that a woman's marriage and her family should come before her musical pursuits,⁹¹ this does not reflect the reality of her own life; instead, it directly mirrors one which might be viewed as correct in polite society.

Beach's own cloister was a perfect environment for one living with an ASD, especially given that she and her husband were among those adopted into Brahmin circles based on their intellect and artistic contributions, not monetary or family inheritance.⁹² This degree of separation would have exempted the composer from social connection outside of her role as an artist, and the opportunity to compose without the additional stress of some womanly duties would have been to Beach's advantage. In fact, many operating with the modernly classified autism spectrum brain would have probably found the strictly prescribed social rules of the Victorian era comforting rather than stressful.⁹³ Victorian rules of decorum were deliberately learned by everyone in middle and upper-class society in America. As presented in previous chapters, the ASD brain craves the systemization of all situations,

⁹⁰ Block, *Amy Beach*. 298.

⁹¹ See Mrs. H. H. A. Beach, "Music after Marriage and Motherhood" *The Etude* XXVII (August 1909), 520 and "Don't Give Up Music At the Alter" *The Etude* XXXIV/7 (July 1919), 407-408.

⁹² Block, *Amy Beach*, 108.

⁹³ Baron-Cohen lists the insistence that others follow social rules as a manifestation of moral systematizing. Baron-Cohen, *Autism and Asperger Syndrome*, 68.

especially those which involve unpredictable factors, such as people and their actions. The greater societal insistence that one follow exact social rules, such as those exhibited and adhered to by upper-class Victorian society would undoubtedly serve as a safe haven for an individual with ASD.⁹⁴

When such rules became obsolete by society and intuitive social interaction became the new determinate for success, it seems obvious that those operating with ASD might then have been at a disadvantage. Joseph Straus proposes, "Today, autism may appear a secure, natural category, but it is as historically and culturally contingent as neurasthenia, hysteria, and fugue—science based and neutral medical categories of a previous era—and may someday share their fate."⁹⁵ Just as modern society is very accepting and tolerable of the "systemblind,"⁹⁶ due to the prevailing success of those who have mastered the art of social interaction, logical thinking suggests that at multiple points in history society favored the less emotional, systematic style of human interaction. Beach's career, marked by general success in a predominantly Victorian society, followed by a waning presence in the personality-based twentieth century, coincided a time of potentially increasing success for those operating with ASD.

⁹⁴ Baron-Cohen, *Autism and Aspergers Syndrome*, 68.

⁹⁵ Straus, "Autism As Culture," 536.

⁹⁶ Baron-Cohen, *The Essential Difference*, 172.

Chapter Four: An Asperger's Argument

Amy Beach certainly exhibited many of the same behavioral characteristics currently associated with an ASD. The *DSM-IV*, as discussed in chapter 2, is used to diagnose present-day children and adults; however, making posthumous diagnostic assumptions regarding anyone's brain functioning presents several issues. The person in question cannot be observed firsthand, which eliminates many of the *DSM-IV*'s criteria and the much needed time for personal interaction and proper diagnosis by a trained psychologist.

One of the most reliable sources when developing a diagnosis of autism or Asperger's syndrome is the personal testimony of an individual's parents or guardians who can provide recollections and information regarding early childhood behavior. In Beach's case her mother, Clara Marcy Cheney, has left us with her own memories of her daughter's peculiar behaviors as a child, many of which suggest that the composer struggled with an ASD. Other indications are provided by music scholars and Beach's friends and acquaintances.

Savant Abilities

Beach showed savant abilities not only in her musical talent but in her feats of memory and foreign language. Cheney writes that her daughter was only a few months old when she "manifested unusual fondness for music."⁹⁷ The infant required her mother to sing her to sleep every night, and by the time she was one-year old, Beach could sing "forty tunes by actual count, often singing an alto perfect

⁹⁷ Cheney, *Handwritten Biography*, 1.

in harmony to the melody or theme that was sung by the person (either her Grandmother or myself) who was rocking her to sleep.”⁹⁸ The young toddler exhibited an extraordinary musical memory and early abilities to aurally distinguish between different keys.⁹⁹

Beach showed much promise as a pianist when she was first allowed to play the piano at age four. Cheney recalls her daughter’s first performance, a duet played with her aunt. The young girl played an improvised second part “perfect in harmony and played with both hands.”¹⁰⁰ Improvisation became part of Beach’s daily practice regimen, as she simultaneously composed her own melodies and accompaniments to children’s poems.¹⁰¹ She was also able to recreate the songs played during her Sunday school classes, complete with harmonic realizations, usually after only one hearing.¹⁰²

The ability to learn quickly from a young age is often considered to be a savant trait and Beach fits this profile quite accurately. When only seventeen-months old, the young prodigy knew the alphabet and was able to name the letters she came across in newspapers and books.¹⁰³ Furthermore, Beach showed early signs of a “tape recorder” memory, as she was able to “recite long poems after hearing them read a few times, many from one hearing only.”¹⁰⁴ The additional

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Absolute pitch is often cited as a trait consistent with the savant abilities common among those with an ASD.

¹⁰⁰ Cheney, *Handwritten Biography*, 5.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 5.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 3.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 5.

pages and scripts found among Cheney's biography of her daughter include the following recollections of Beach's extraordinary feats of reading and memory.

I have never known a child so fond of the Scriptures, she committed many of the longest psalms to memory without the least effort, her favorite was Psalm XCI (91st). When four years of age she visited a school in Chelsea and at the request of the principal of this school, read aloud with the class of young ladies from the same reader much to their astonishment, she recited the poem "Little Will" [.] When six years old as one of the exercises at the Anniversary of the Sabbath School in the Congregational Church in C [Chelsea], the church was crowded, she stood on the rostrum alone and without any faltering or mistakes recited with great feeling this poem which occupied fully thirteen minutes, as her teacher was so interested that she "timed" Amy, she told me.¹⁰⁵

While her mother did not recall exactly the time that her daughter began to read musical notation, Cheney does write of one specific instance. She writes:

One day while I was sewing, she [Beach] brought her book of Sabbath School songs and laid it open across my lap. 'Please Mamma tell me what all the notes and queer little signs are called,' I did so, not spending any time as I was not in favor of allowing her to play or study music at all until she was older, and stranger, a few days after this occurred I found her calling off imaginary notes from a piece of coloured print or cambric, striped with five black narrow bars and spaces like the music staff.¹⁰⁶

This recollection demonstrates that the child intuitively learned the musical language and, like many memory masters, was unable to forget information pertaining to music.

Childhood Behavior

Savant capabilities alone are not an indication of one's status on the autism spectrum, despite the fact that approximately fifty percent of all savants struggle with autism. Such a condition primarily affects one's social capabilities. One of the

¹⁰⁵ Cheney, Handwritten Biography, 5.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 8.

DSM-IV's criteria for an Asperger's diagnosis states that the child often fails to form peer relationships at an appropriate level.¹⁰⁷ Block addresses this issue regarding the composer's lack of childhood friends, stating that Clara Cheney's homeschooling was seen as a "claustrophobic way of living that deprived [Beach] of companions of her own age."¹⁰⁸ Beach's odd and often erratic behavior as a child provides additional clues as to the composer's normal brain function.

One of the differentiating factors between autism and Asperger's syndrome is the lack of delay of spoken language. Those with autism may not speak until age four or five, but people falling towards the Asperger's point on the autism spectrum do begin to speak on time. Although Cheney does not cite an exact age at which her daughter began to develop her language skills, she indicates that Beach began to speak during the teething process.¹⁰⁹ Generally, a child will cut his or her first tooth around four to seven months of age.¹¹⁰ Cheney recalls the following evening:

One evening when restless from pain caused by the little swollen gums, her grandmother carrying her about in her arms stopped suddenly before the window where the shades were not drawn, the stars bright and clear in the blue firmament. Amy lifted her head from her Grandmother's shoulder, her long golden hair floating about her head, her cheeks still wet with tears of suffering. With an angelic smile and heavenly expression in her blue eyes, she held up the baby hands to the moon and sang in a remarkably strong voice one of her favorites, "The Moon shines full at His command and all the stars obey."¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ See DSM-IV criteria for Asperger's diagnosis, included in Chapter 2.

¹⁰⁸ Block, *Amy Beach*, 12. Block continues and states that Beach showed a remarkable talent for friendship in her later years. Most of these friendships, however, were with younger women who greatly admired Beach's success, thus bringing into question Beach's ability to form true peer relationships regardless of her status.

¹⁰⁹ Cheney, *Handwritten Biography*, 2.

¹¹⁰ Many children go through the teething process within their first twelve months of life. While many modern doctors cite the processes as beginning around the age of four to six months, W. V. Drury, a doctor working in London around the year 1880, states that teething begins around the age of seven months. See William V. Drury and T.C. Duncan, *Teething and Croup* (Chicago: Duncan Brothers, 1881).

¹¹¹ Cheney, *Handwritten Biography*, 2.

Directly following this statement, Beach's mother writes that her daughter began to speak.¹¹² Certain clues regarding the young child's language processing and development are certainly apparent according to Cheney's accounts. She writes:

At this age she commenced to talk, the first words spoken were "Waz at." (What's that) pointing at the same time at different objects about the room. The answer must be expressed exactly the same as it was when given the first time, or the question would be repeated again and again, each time with more emphasis and using inflection, as she gained more words day by day.¹¹³

Obviously the little girl expected her world to operate according to a sense of auditory exactness. Cheney further explains that the same rules applied to music as well. A song sung to young Beach had to be replicated exactly for subsequent hearings. Her mother writes, "this same trait was perceptible in music, one must always sing a tune as it was first sung to her, any variation no matter how slight, would provoke a show of spirit and she would immediately cry "sing it clean."¹¹⁴

Abnormal sensitivity to sound stimulation is a common trait among those on the autism spectrum, and Beach showed early signs of aural discomfort. As a child, she could not endure laughter and her mother had to carry her out of a room on many occasions due to the noise made by guests in the house. Cheney states that "the laughing of guests distressed her to such a degree that it was painful to witness her tears and hear the sobs, her lip would quiver at the first signs of mirth."¹¹⁵ Research Autism, affiliated with the University of Cambridge, states that many autism patients suffer from hyperacusis, finding specific sounds distressing,

¹¹² Ibid., 3.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 4.

disturbing, or even painful.¹¹⁶ Beach would continue to have difficulties with certain sounds for the rest of her life.¹¹⁷

Spontaneous sounds were not the only aural stimulation in which Beach suffered childhood difficulty. Cheney states that playing the piano and music in general made her daughter quite content, but “music also made her correspondingly unhappy. Music written in a minor key was tabooed, the theme of [Gottschalk’s] “The Last Hope” was often sung or played to her as punishment when the little fingers were getting into mischief. This always had the desired effect, the little hands would drop what had been grasped and tears would immediately flow.”¹¹⁸

Narrow interests and repetitive behaviors are a classic sign of an ASD. For the composer, obviously her greatest love and interest was music. As a toddler, Beach would sit for hours and listen to music, as Cheney recalls, “At this time the violin playing of Prof. C. C. Gibson of Henniker ... accompanied by myself on the piano gave her [Beach] a great delight, she would sit for hours without moving listening to his beautiful performance.”¹¹⁹ Many children on the autism spectrum will sit examining an object or listening intensely for very long periods of time, which differs greatly from the generally short attention span of a neuro-typical two-year-old child. At eight years of age, Cheney notes that her daughter loved Beethoven’s music “best of all. She would sit for hours and play his music until she

¹¹⁶ For more information on hearing and sound perception see: http://www.researchautism.net/autism_issues_challenges_problems.ikml?ra=16&infolevel=2 (accessed 30 March 2012).

¹¹⁷ Block, *Amy Beach*, 4.

¹¹⁸ Cheney, *Handwritten Biography*, 4-5.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

would have to be taken by force from the piano.”¹²⁰ Nothing distracted Beach from any sort of music, as her mother writes that often “when I was playing over new music, I have known her to drop her play outdoors and run into the room where I was at the piano as ask, ‘What new piece is that you are playing in such a key?’ naming the key correctly.”¹²¹

Beach showed many frustrations in reference to music, as do many musicians and composers. As stated previously, Beach did have absolute pitch and from a young age her mother encouraged her to associate different colors with different keys. In many instances, she would transpose a piece of music if the piano was out of tune in order to keep the piece within the original key in which it was written.¹²² When Beach was around eight years old, her repertory was increasing at a great pace, and often, the child, already small for her age, would have difficulty reaching and sustaining chords meant to be played by adult hands; as a result, she was forced to drop the lowest notes. “This was a great trial and would bring tears of grief and anger, screams of mingled sorrow and mirth would issue from the child’s throat.”¹²³

One of young Beach’s own anecdotal reports also provides evidence regarding her own precociousness as a young performer. Block records an unidentified clipping by writer Olin Downes in his article entitled “Mrs. H. H. A. Beach of Boston, Now Noted as Composer.” In his 1907 report regarding the young performer’s debut performance, Downes presents Beach’s thoughts and feelings regarding this event.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 9.

¹²¹ Ibid., 10.

¹²² Block, *Amy Beach*, 10.

¹²³ Cheney, *Handwritten Biography*, 9.

The presence of that throng of people was an inspiration. And as for the orchestra ... (it was my first experience with one), no words can tell the pleasure I felt performing with a band of instrumentalists, each member of it himself such a musician as to sense my wishes more quickly and surely than the greatest conductor could convey them. I can only compare my sensations with those of a driver, who holds in his hand the reins that perfectly control a glorious, spirited pair of horses. One must live through such an experience to properly appreciate it.¹²⁴

Block interprets these words and comments on Beach's inexperience with professional musicians such as those of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. She writes, "The inexperienced child, totally devoid of stage fright and playing with orchestra for the first time, had vied with the conductor for control and won."¹²⁵

While it is impossible to tell whether or not Beach was purposely asserting her own wishes over the conductor's wishes, which is a fairly definitive trait often associated with Asperger's patients as many long for direct and complete control over any situation, it is interesting that Block notes that Beach did not experience stagefright. This type of self-confidence is also typical of the Asperger's population especially in their own areas of obsessive interest, in Beach's case, music.

Interestingly, Block cites a critic for the *Gazette* describing Cheney's demeanor during her debut performance as "winningly modest, though it lacked nothing in easy self-possession." Although Beach would continue to personify an unpretentious, content, and selfless Victorian, other evidence indicates that her inward concept of herself may not have been exceptionally modest. In Beach's analysis of Dvořák's Cello Concerto in B minor, she describes the first movement:

It is sweet, suave and borders on the commonplace, yet it suits the cello cantabile well. Of, course, it does not bear working as does the first theme, nor does

¹²⁴ Orin Downes, qtd. in Block, *Amy Beach*, 30.

¹²⁵ Block, *Amy Beach*, 30.

Dvořák attempt it. There is considerable “squealy” passage work before the working-out is reach, of the usual unsatisfactory and all but impossible kind, excepting that here the arpeggios etc. mean more musically than in other concertos and seem to blend with the orchestral harmony.¹²⁶

Block comments on the young composer’s “hint of arrogance,” attributing Beach’s critical analysis of the cello concerto to the “inexperience of youth.”¹²⁷

Adult Social Behavior

When Beach married Dr. Henry H. A. Beach in 1885, the young woman was expected to participate in Boston’s elite society. A new task such as this one would probably intimidate anyone with an ASD today, and Beach was no exception. According to longtime personal friend Ester Bates, Beach found her new “life as his [Dr. Beach’s] wife arduous and a tax on her utmost powers of social intercourse.”¹²⁸ While this statement and those like it have often been used to present evidence of a controlling marriage relationship on the part of Dr. Beach, this may in turn represent a more inward struggle with social situations which would have been quite intimidating. It is interesting, however, that Dr. Beach is described as “a man of personal charm and magnetism” who possessed not only surgical and intellectual talents, but musical abilities as well.¹²⁹ It is easy to see how the socially well-adapted husband could possibly educate his new wife in the ways of Brahmin society, as well as in proper household duties as well.

¹²⁶ Beach, qtd. in Block, 56.

¹²⁷ Block, *Amy Beach*, 56. It must also be noted that the social climate in America during this time was a probable influence on Beach’s perception of the Czech composer’s music and should not be fully attributed to an Asperger’s condition. The evidence, however, is revealing of both greater social context and hidden arrogance on the part of the composer.

¹²⁸ Jenkins, *The Remarkable Mrs. Beach*, 19.

¹²⁹ Block, *Amy Beach*, 43.

The composer was not always as decorous as her social status would dictate. Beach was particular about changing the “color” or key of a piece not only as a child but this issue persisted into her adulthood. Walter Jenkins recalls her reaction to an unauthorized transposition of a piece in order to accommodate a singer:

At the annual Beach Day in Henniker on 15 October 1935, William R. McAllister “took the liberty of transposing [her *Stella viatoris*, op. 100] down from A-flat to G-flat” to accommodate the singer, Vera Oxner; after the concert, “Mrs. Beach blasted out” at McAllister, “What did you do to my song?” Indeed, she was so concerned over the key in which the piece was performed, that she would publish transpositions of a composition only in a like-colored key.¹³⁰

The composer’s reaction, described as “blasting” by the author, would have been unusual for Beach as she generally presented a mild-mannered lady-like appearance.

The Diaries of Amy Beach

According to prevailing research, Beach has been classified as an old-fashioned and well-mannered Victorian lady who knew her social place and was content to carve out her career while still obeying the wishes of her “hard-boiled” husband.¹³¹ Her diary entries, however, indicate that Beach was quite fond of her Victorian attributes.

The blank five-year comparative pocket diary kept by Beach, encompassing the years from 1926 to 1931, was printed by the Samuel Ward Company of Boston, Massachusetts. The physical book was copyrighted in 1892, although it gives no indication as to the year the journal was purchased. The pocket diary had been a

¹³⁰ Block, *Amy Beach*, 43. The claims of Mr. Jenkins have not been undoubtedly authenticated.

¹³¹ H. A. S. “At 74, Mrs. Beach Recalls Her First Critics” *Musical Courier* CXXIII (May 15, 1941), 7.

popular record keeping tool, originally intended for use by businessmen in the early 1850s, although the format was quickly adopted by women for the purpose of keeping daily family records.¹³² These small commercially published books were very popular gifts for wives and daughters, so one may only speculate that a small book such as this one could have been a gift from Henry to his wife before his death in 1910. The lack of Henry's inscription suggests that the diary was purchased later by Beach herself, but the publisher's title page suggests that the physical diary could have been purchased much earlier owing to the listing of the publisher on the cover page, a rare practice after the 1860s.¹³³

The publishing company included the following instructional prefatory for the diary's intended use:

You have neither the time nor the inclination, possibly, to keep a full diary. Supposed, however, out of the multitude of matters that crowd each day, you jot down in a line or two those most worthy of remembrance. Such a book will be of the greatest value in after years. Whay a record of events, incidents, joys, sorrows, successes, failures, things accomplished, things attempted. This book is designed for just such a record. It can be commenced on any day of the year, and is so printed that it is good for any five years.

To illustrate how it should be used, suppose that it is begun on January 1. Under that day, in the first space, add the proper figures for the year to the date as printed. On the next day, January 2, do likewise, and so on thought the year. When the year is ended begin again under January I for the second year, adding the appropriate figures in each of the second spaces, and so right through the remaining years.¹³⁴

The space is quite limited in terms of writing allocations. Beach's entries seem, at first glance, a dense conglomeration of very short, fragmented, or even one word

¹³² Molly McCarthy, "A Pocketful of Days: Pocket Diaries and Record Keeping Among Nineteenth Century New England Women" *The New England Quarterly* LXXIII/2 (June 2000) 275.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 283.

¹³⁴ Beach, *Diary*, Publisher's Printed Preface.

sentences. Names of individuals are usually abbreviated with a single letter or two. Generally, the composer would record the weather conditions of the day, along with her visitors, letters written to friends and family members, health concerns, musical performances attended, books read, and compositions she began or completed. One such entry is typical of Beach's daily diary writing habits:

Rainy. Cook not able to go to market &/ maid "tired." We lunched at Embassy Tearoom. SKC, concert 4, by Salomeo Kruceniska, dream of [Gerontius]. Interesting program. Passé but fine. Tea Mrs. Daniels (See Embassy) Dined Palace Hotel. Delicious. Home 9. Rained hard. Thunder during night.¹³⁵

This entry is typical of any nineteenth century woman's pocket diary entry, although one might pay special attention to the reference to thunder and rain twice in the entry, as it has already been established that the composer struggled with sensory issues pertaining to stormy weather. McCarthy writes of the records kept by Jane Briggs Smith Fiske, a woman living in New England around the year 1870. Fiske's entries are quite similar in nature. Her entry for 12 September 1874 reads, "Weather same & some men at work. Finished Hattie's room She ironed and I baked in the afternoon. So tired. *What a hateful hateful hateful world.*"¹³⁶

There are some rather marked similarities between the two women's entries. Beach and Fiske both use condensed sentences which provide the reader, presumably the diarist, an accurate accounting for the day's events. Each comment on the weather and describe their daily accomplishments. The entry by Fiske, however, exhibits a tone in one line that Beach, writing almost fifty years later,

¹³⁵ Beach, *Diary*, 25 January 1929.

¹³⁶ Fiske, qtd. in McCarthy, "A Pocketful of Days," 290.

never included in her daily records. It is this lack of emotional distress or even elation laid down in writing which is conspicuously absent from Beach's writing.

This is not to say, however, that Beach's diaries are full of dry facts and daily chronology without the insertion of her own opinions. Consider her entry from 20 March 1930: "Foreign Policy Lunch. Conditions in Russia discussed. Max Eastman Socialist, Rev. D Limons Methodist, Mrs. Vera Nichols Depue & others. Exciting. Home by 5." While some of these names are difficult to decipher due to the composer's handwriting, this entry indicates that the composer did in fact record her emotional thoughts, although obviously not to Fiske's degree, demonstrating her factual communication style.

Chapter Five: Musical Manifestations

Among the studies of historic figures with suspected ASDs there are virtually no consistent stylistic traits which govern "autistic creation." Mozart, Beethoven, Bartók and Satie have been retroactively diagnosed with an ASD;¹³⁷ however, one would find much difficulty trying to argue that all three composed music in the very same manner. There are several reasons for these differences including historic time, location, socialization, culture, and other external influences. The most pertinent reason for such a wide variety of creative styles is that each of them were individuals, and the autism spectrum can be described as an affliction of extreme individualism. Each person functioning with such a disorder, either past or present, is subject to their own social and cultural milieu as well as their own brain function.

¹³⁷ See Michael Fitzgerald, *The Genesis of Artistic Creativity*. (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2005).

Autism is a spectrum disorder, so every individual is different. Despite these rather obvious differentiations in both musical and artistic style, many of the same traits, which are also rather consistent with an ASD, can be observed in many of those artists' creative works.

For these reasons, I will focus on autism spectrum traits exhibited by Beach herself and in her music. Four aspects of her writing style indicate autistic traits: personal meanings and associations, the apparent derivative nature of her writing style, manifestations of local coherence, and her fascination with nature and bird songs.

Personal Meanings

Beach's strong personal associations between the original thematic material she incorporated into the Piano Concerto have been suspected by Block, especially regarding their inherent hidden meaning.¹³⁸ Many people with an ASD ascribe personal meanings to objects, songs, literary works, or anything deemed of interest by a specific person. By using the term "personal meanings," autism scholars are not referring to sentimental attachment to an object but rather, to a personal set of associations made by the autistic person. Joseph Straus explains that:

Autistic expression is often introverted, directed inward rather than outward. Instead of a chain of logical inference, one often finds rich networks of association, often private in nature. Often these network consist of richly observed specific details: autistic thinking tends to be concrete rather than abstract."¹³⁹

Beach's music definitely displays originality, perhaps not in the traditional sense,

¹³⁸ Block, *Amy Beach*, 132-142.

¹³⁹ Straus, "Autism As Culture," 544.

but in her choice of subject material and variants on compositional style. The composer is often accused of being old-fashioned in her writing style, but I hope to bring to light many of the unique qualities not traditionally seen by scholars or musicians as contributions to originality.

Block has suggested that many of Beach's pieces represent an aspect of her life. In 1993, Block demonstrated in her article, "A Veritable Autobiography? The Piano Concerto," that this piece was not only one of Beach's large scale works that earned her a place among American composers, but that it also contains hidden meanings regarding the Beach's personal conflicts with her family.¹⁴⁰ It does not portray a series of events in her life; rather, it reveals her personal struggle with those who closely controlled her professional career. Such a musical manifestation of emotional struggle can certainly be classified as introverted expression, "directed inward rather than outward."¹⁴¹

Block bases her argument for Beach's autobiographical approach in the Piano Concerto on the songs from which certain themes derive, and the subsequent treatment of such material.¹⁴² In the November 1918 issue of *Etude*, Beach published an article entitled, "To the Girl Who Wanted to Compose." Referring to the statement "Oh, anyone can write a song!" by an anonymous female, Beach writes of the importance of serious compositional practices and elements of the art song and larger works.¹⁴³ Block cites two articles when speaking of a composer's

¹⁴⁰ Adrienne Fried Block, "A 'Veritable Autobiography'? Amy Beach's Piano Concerto in C-Sharp Minor, op. 45," *The Musical Quarterly* LXXVIII/2 (Summer 1994), 394-416.

¹⁴¹ Straus, "Autism As Culture," 544.

¹⁴² Block, *Amy Beach*, 132-142.

¹⁴³ Mrs. H. H. A. Beach, "To the Girl Who Wants to Compose," *The Etude* LXVI (November 1918), 695.

potential “veritable autobiography.”¹⁴⁴ The composer writes:

Some writers have been influenced at once by some tremendous happening in their lives, or in the world around them, and have been able to burst forth with some musical utterance that was directly the result of circumstances. Another composer might remain apparently unaffected by even the most terrific onslaught upon all that was deepest in his life, and years afterward give expression in music, perhaps unconsciously, to all that the experience had cost him. Here we are touching upon perhaps the most wonderful thing of all about musical composition. It may be not only the creation of an art-form, but a veritable autobiography, whether conscious or unconscious.¹⁴⁵

Beach utilizes three songs as thematic material for the Concerto, one in each of the first three movements. In the first movement, she revisits her own song setting of *Jeune fille et jeune fleur*, Op. 1, No. 3 (1887). The song depicts the funeral of a young woman as her father stands by and weeps as his daughter is lowered into her untimely grave. Dr. Beach had sung this piece before their marriage, and Block believes that the composer strongly associated her husband with the text. Block argues that the poem “may well have been heavy with symbolism for Beach: her suitor, then husband, ... had buried her ambitions as a pianist even as he obliterated her name and replaced it with his.”¹⁴⁶

The song quoted in the second movement, *Empress of Night* Op. 2, no. 3 (1891), Block argues, is one of the few that Beach could have associated with both her mother and her husband. Beach set her husband’s original poetry and dedicated the song to her aging mother, who was probably the first to perform the work.¹⁴⁷ Block claims that Beach’s choice of textual theme is significant. She states, “Texts of songs were not only very important to Beach but generative. Because this

¹⁴⁴ Block, *Amy Beach*, 132.

¹⁴⁵ Beach, “To the Girl Who Wants to Compose,” 35.

¹⁴⁶ Block, *Amy Beach*, 132.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

poem is one of Henry Beach's pedestrian efforts, she probably did not choose it for its poetic quality. ... The image of the moon, traditionally a female symbol, is highly suggestive."¹⁴⁸ Block describes the piano commentary as intrusive, unlike Beach's other songs, which the scholar suggests is a conscious choice on the part of the composer.¹⁴⁹ As evidence of a mother-daughter struggle, Block cites the fact that Clara Cheney had been recently widowed and was residing in her daughter's home while Beach composed the Concerto.¹⁵⁰

The third self-reference, Beach's setting of *Twilight* (1887), also written by her husband, appears in the third movement. As Beach commonly associated a color with a specific key, Block asserts that the composer's choice of F-sharp minor, a "black" key, for both the song and the third movement of the Concerto is significant.¹⁵¹ Block observes that, in the third movement, the orchestra and the soloist are no longer battling for the foreground; instead, each plays in its own time and space.¹⁵² In conclusion, Block evaluates the nature of each reference, not only individually, but also as a whole. Taken together, she asserts, the three auto-quotations present a plot that illustrates the composer's view of herself and her position in society. Block writes, "This evolution suggests a plot that encapsulates the most important issue of Beach's life, her struggle for the freedom to play whenever and wherever she chose."¹⁵³

Block not only uses Beach's choice of thematic source material to

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 136.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 136-137.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 139.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 141.

substantiate her argument, but also Beach's own words taken from her published writing. Beach's description of her Piano Concerto, published first in the *Los Angeles Times* and reprinted in *Musical Courier* as "Californians Fête Mrs. H. H. A. Beach," is used to prove further the validity of Block's extramusical findings, as she extracts and emphasizes parts of the text.¹⁵⁴ Beach describes her own concerto:

The work is in four movements, the last two begin connected. The first, "Allegro," is serious in character, piano and orchestra vying with each other in the development of the two principle themes, of which the second is song like in character. There is a richly worked out cadenza for the solo instrument near the close of the movement.

The second movement, "Scherzo," bears the subtitle 'perptuum mobile,' and consists of a piquant etude rhythm unbroken throughout the piano part, set against an orchestral background that sings the melody in the stringed instruments. This is a short movement with a brief cadenza for the piano before the final resumption of the principle theme.

The slow movement is a dark, tragic lament, which, after working up to an impassioned climax, passes through a very soft transition phase directly into the last movement, a bright vivacious 'rondo.' Before the close there comes a repetition of the lament theme, with varied development, quickly followed by a renewal of the rondo and then a coda.¹⁵⁵

Block emphasizes the word "vying" (placing it in italics) as it applies to the piano and orchestral writing.¹⁵⁶ Block states that she believes that the triumphant piano represents the composer and performer herself, while the orchestra represents Beach's mother and husband with which the piano is battling for freedom.¹⁵⁷ Block attributes the composer's classification of the third movement as a "dark, tragic

¹⁵⁴ Block, *Amy Beach*, 134-135.

¹⁵⁵ Mrs. H. H. A. Beach, "Californian Fête Mrs. H. H. A. Beach," *Musical Courier* LXXI (14 July 1915), 7.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 134.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 134-135.

lament”¹⁵⁸ to her lack of freedom when it came to her performing career.¹⁵⁹

The Piano Concerto is not the only piece of music in which a personal meaning has been perceptively inscribed into the work. In fact, Block has identified many other works that suggest that Beach’s marital life was less than ideal for her. Along the same line of the concerto is Beach’s setting of *Jephthah’s Daughter*, op. 53. Block reminds her reader that the work “recalls the pathos of her earlier *Jeune fille et jeune fleur*,” in which a father buries his daughter, with a narrative voice that objectifies both the quick and the deal.”¹⁶⁰ The piece not only has a thematic link, but also links in the musical setting. Block continues:

In the aria, however, the daughter is the singer throughout, expressing her own despair over the imminent sacrifice of her life to save her father’s. Nature and time are again invoked in the contrast between her death and the ever-renewing cycle of day and night. The reference to Jephthah’s daughter, who would die childless, had resonance for Beach’s life: after seventeen years of marriage, there were still no children, nor would there be any, something she may have regretted.¹⁶¹

Block shows that the two pieces share both thematic symbolism and concrete relationships, reminding the reader that both pieces are set in the key of F-sharp minor, a black key in Beach’s mind, and that the treatment of the musical lines and harmonic variation are quite distinctive of what the scholar deems Beach’s “most tragic elements.”¹⁶²

The choral setting of Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.’s poem *The Chambered Nautilus* also seems to have a great personal significance to Beach. First of all, it was

¹⁵⁸ Beach, “Californians Fête Mrs. H. H. A. Beach,” 7.

¹⁵⁹ Block, *Amy Beach*, 141.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.* Block cites an interview with David Buxbaum, who knew Beach personally, on 21 August 1986 regarding this statement.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

the poem that Holmes had inscribed in young Amy Cheney's autograph book in 1883.¹⁶³ Block mentions that after her marriage to Henry Beach, the young composer often associated with Holmes and others of his social caste.¹⁶⁴ Commissioned in 1907 by the St. Cecilia Club and performed in early 1908, the piece was written in the midst of Clara Cheney's health deterioration. Henry was one year older than Clara and Block suggests that the composer may have anticipated the end of her family situation in its current state.¹⁶⁵

Derivative Nature

The second aspect of the composer's writing style deals with the nature of her musical language. In the closing chapter of her text, Block makes the following statement regarding Beach's compositional style: "Even as her style is derivative, Beach's compositions are nevertheless marked by individuality."¹⁶⁶ Given her surrounding cultural expectations of women as composers, she faced intense criticism of her work based solely on her sex. If she did not write music according to the rules of Western music, Beach would not have been taken seriously as a composer. This stigma does not seem to affect Beach's core compositional style, and it is likely that she would have composed in much the same manner had there not been a social bias against women as musicians and serious composers.

One of the composer's juvenile works, a song titled *The Rainy Day*, quotes Beethoven's Rondo Allegro from his Opus 13 Piano Sonata, although this work may

¹⁶³ Ibid, 167.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 168.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 173.

¹⁶⁶ Block, *Amy Beach*, 298.

in fact reinforce many of the ideas and recollections about Beach's early behavior as cataloged by her mother.¹⁶⁷ Beach's natural tendency toward a derivative style can be seen as a manifestation of a person operating with an ASD or a desire to prove herself worthy of respect within a male dominated field. In favor of the former explanation, it should be noted that Beach never explicitly tried to prove any sort of social agenda. In fact, her writings suggest quite the opposite.

The composer addressed the issue of women and music in her writings throughout her life. Published one year before the death of her husband, Beach responded to *Etude* magazine's inquiry regarding the place of music in the life of a married woman and mother. In the essay titled "Music after Marriage and Motherhood," she asserts that a woman must first attend to her duties as a woman and then allow time for her own musical development. She describes this viewpoint as part of the natural discourse of life.¹⁶⁸ In subsequent essays, Beach writes that while she strongly encourages women not to discontinue music making due to marital responsibilities, she does recognize that married women may not be able to keep the technical facility needed to play large works, due to lack of practice time.¹⁶⁹ In addition to this acknowledgement, however, Beach argues that a mother who is skilled in music can contribute to the well being of her home and family by continuing her music study.¹⁷⁰ A mother who plays quality music for her young

¹⁶⁷ See above

¹⁶⁸ Mrs. H. H. A. Beach, "Music after Marriage and Motherhood," *Etude* XXVII (August 1909), 520.

¹⁶⁹ Mrs. H. H. A. Beach, "Don't Give Up Music at the Altar: A Symposium by Noted Women in Music," *The Etude* XXXIV/7 (July 1919), 407-08.

¹⁷⁰ Beach, "Music after Marriage and Motherhood," 520.

children can pursue her own musical interest while at the same time contributes to the musical activities of the community.¹⁷¹

In addition to her commendation to her parents for their divinely inspired and prudent decision regarding her life as a child prodigy, Beach also discusses her lack of formal composition training. The composer recalls her days of studying harmony with Junius W. Hill and her relentless independent study of compositional treatises and orchestral scores. Beach does cite her husband as the predominant reason that she did not receive formalized composition training. Her words regarding Dr. Beach's prohibition are as follows:

My husband, in fact, would never allow me to have a teacher in composition. He felt that here lay my work... Incidentally I didn't believe him, for I thought I was a pianist first and foremost. His encouragement and interest led me into composition more seriously, and yet upon one point he remained firm-I should not have a teacher lest through an outside influence my ideas be moulded into something foreign to myself.¹⁷²

It seems here that Dr. Beach was not trying to stifle his wife's creative masterpieces. Rather, one could interpret the doctor's reason behind precluding Beach from formal schooling as an act of supreme admiration for her compositional talents.

One of Block's overriding assumptions regarding the subject of formal musical study is that Beach felt as though she must battle with her living situations, both before and during her marriage, in order to establish her own viability as a composer in the eyes of her predominantly male colleagues and her audience.¹⁷³

Beach's writings do not bear out this assertion. Supporting Beach's statement in *Etude*, where she directly states,

¹⁷¹ Beach, "Don't Give Up Music," 407-08.

¹⁷² Beach, [Untitled], 2.

¹⁷³ See Block, *Amy Beach*. 21-33, 42-53.

In regard to the position of women composers I may say that I have personally never felt myself handicapped in any way, nor have I encountered prejudice of any sort on account of my being a woman, and I believe that the field for musical composition in American offers exactly the same prospects to young women as to young men composers¹⁷⁴

are the letters written to her by her colleagues and other notable figures of Beach's time, which uniformly present the view that Beach's colleagues held her in the highest regard, placing her on an equal footing with any of her male contemporaries.¹⁷⁵

Another obstacle that stands in the way of making a decisive argument for Beach's derivative style being a tendency exacerbated by an ASD, is the fact that many young composers studied composition by copying scores or by using models to compile their first scores. Beach's approach, however, relied more on self-training than the influence of an ever-present instructor. During her adult years, Beach actually wrote about her early learning of compositional processes through the intense self-study of musical scores. Her article titled "Work Out Your Own Salvation" discloses information regarding her own young pedagogical training. Many people diagnosed with autism today find it easier to learn on their own, although certainly not everyone is self-taught. Beach strongly encouraged young students to study the great composers, specifically Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms.

The composer writes:

There are many lines of study which may be pursued alone, and with not only deep enjoyment, but genuine benefit to real growth. I cannot remember when the thought first took shape in my mind, that my best development must be through my own unaided effort. "Work out your own salvation" became my

¹⁷⁴ Beach, "Don't Give Up Music," 407-08.

¹⁷⁵ These such letters include George Chadwick's declaration of Beach as "one of the boys."

motto at so early a stage in my musical life, that it has passed beyond recollection.¹⁷⁶

This type of self-teaching is common among those with an ASD, even to the extent that most learn new concepts by personal experimentation rather than an imposed technique from an outside source.¹⁷⁷

Local Coherence in Music

It is said that many people on the autism spectrum “think in pictures” rather than words.¹⁷⁸ Simply stated, using the English language to describe a system seems unnatural to some people and they prefer creating images or systems without the aid of conventional methodologies.¹⁷⁹ Block includes a reference to Beach’s local-coherence-like approach to composition from an untitled article published in the *Boston Globe* on 1 March 1896. Beach described her mental compositional process: “The key is the first thing to suggest itself to me, and after that it comes, phrase by phrase, until the whole has taken shape.”¹⁸⁰ Such a statement suggests that Beach typically used a local coherence method of composition, rather than a more centralized idea.

The most decisive clue as to the nature of Beach’s mental concept of music probably lies in her own descriptions of her music. Her personal analysis of the

¹⁷⁶ Amy Beach, “Work Out Your Own Salvation” *The Etude* January 1918.

¹⁷⁷ Nemeth D, Janacsek K, Balogh V, Londe Z, Mingesz R, et al. (2010) Learning in Autism: Implicitly Superb. PLoS ONE 5(7): e11731. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0011731 (accessed 2 April 2012).

¹⁷⁸ Grandin, *Thinking in Pictures*, 19-42.

¹⁷⁹ This sort of “thinking in pictures” is directly related to a weak central coherence as explained in chapter 2.

¹⁸⁰ Block, *Amy Beach*, 58.

Gaelic Symphony records this type of linear, sectionalized thinking as opposed to describing her music as a whole entity. She writes:

I. Allegro con fuoco. (6/8) (Orchestra: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets in A, 2 bassoons, four horns & two trumpets in F, three trombone & bass-tuba, kettle drums in B & E and strings.) The movement begins *pp* with a murmuring chromatic figure which is extensively used throughout as an accompaniment to the principal themes.¹⁸¹ It is first given very softly by the strings, gradually increasing in force and fullness of instrumentation as it ascends higher and higher until the full orchestra ushers in a portion of the first theme, used as horn and trumpet calls. A subsidiary legato phrase in the wood-wind against a pizzicato accompaniment in the strings leads to the murmuring figure now associated with the first theme in its entirety. The latter is divided among the horns, wood wind instruments and trumpets and is always accompanied by the soft rustling of the strings. The last half of the theme is at one repeated by the violins in octaves, with a richly harmonized accompaniment for wind and brass instruments.¹⁸²

The entire personal analysis continues in this manner. In very few cases does the composer refer to the composition as a whole, but such instances do occasionally appear. For example, her description of the third movement includes statements such as "A short introduction, founded upon a fragment of the first theme, forms the beginning of the 3rd movement. It is worked out by the horns and wind instruments, among which are prominent a somber trio of clarinets, frequently heard throughout the movement."¹⁸³ Such references to the work or movement as a whole are greatly overshadowed by extremely sequential descriptions of the musical occurrences.

Bird Songs

¹⁸¹ I do recognize that statements such as the previous one do display some awareness of a greater whole in the composition, but the writing is predominantly focused on a musical event by event basis.

¹⁸² Beach, Typescript Personal Analysis of the Gaelic Symphony, (Milne Special Collections: University of New Hampshire-Durham, n.d., 1).

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 3.

After Beach's return from Europe at the outbreak of World War I, she eventually, in 1921, became a McDowell Colony fellow. The composer had always been a collector of bird songs, but Beach was especially interested in recording the song of the hermit thrush. Block records Beach's words:

I took the songs down at the bird's dictation, and oh, how hard I worked! Even the most expert stenographer would have had difficulty keeping up with him! I took them exactly, even as to key (except for a few intervals too small to be transcribed) and rewrote and corrected as he sang them over and over. Then I played them back to him and he would answer.¹⁸⁴

As discussed in Chapter 2, those on the autism spectrum often become very interested in the natural world. Beach tended to incorporate nature themes, but her two pieces involving the hermit thrush are quite unique. The composer even informs the reader, "These bird-calls are exact notations of hermit thrush songs, in the original keys but an octave lower, obtained at Mac Dowell [sic] Colony, Peterborough, N.H."¹⁸⁵ Not only is Beach quite accurate in her notations, but it shows a certain level of tendency toward detail and emphasis on precision.

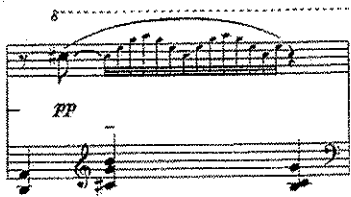
The bird calls that Beach aurally dictated also possess a palindromic quality. All of these songs translate into musical ideas that can be notated with ease without changing the pitch level or intervallic quality, as many of the hermit thrush's songs resemble an arpeggio. It is not surprising that someone with an ASD would be attracted to a naturally occurring melody that exactly resembles one of his or her own obsessions. One might also note that Beach played the bird song back to the Hermit thrushes, establishing an alternate sense of communication often used by

¹⁸⁴ Block, *Amy Beach*, 221.

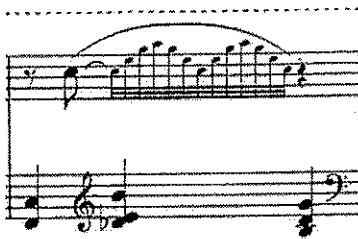
¹⁸⁵ Amy Beach, "A Hermit Thrush at Morn" Op. 92 No. 2, *Piano Music*, ed. Adrienne Fried Block (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2001) 55.

those on the spectrum. The *Hermit Thrush At Morn* contains the following bird songs as printed in the musical score¹⁸⁶:

Hermit Thrush at Morn, m. 13.

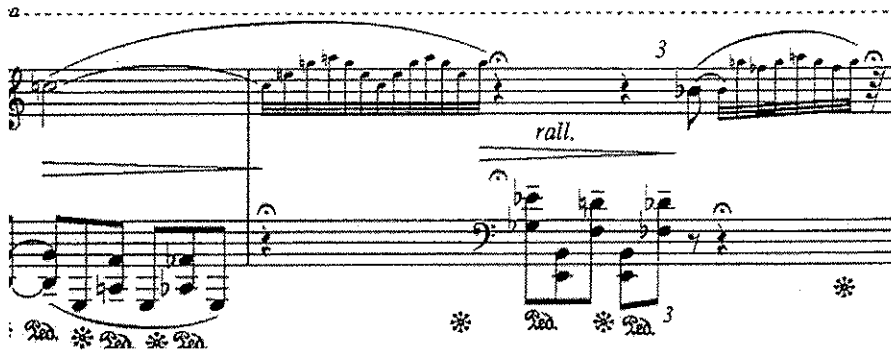


Hermit Thrush at Eve, m. 71



Hermit Thrush at Eve, m 48-49.

¹⁸⁶ Examples reproduced from Amy Beach, *Music for Piano II*, "A Hermit Thrush At Morn, Op. 92, No. 1," Sylvia Glickman, ed. (Bryn Mawr, PA: Hildegard Publishing Company)1997.



Another example of the same type of precise inclusion of bird songs occurs in the second movement of Beach's *Summer Dreams*, Op. 47, a set of duet pieces for piano. Each of these pieces seems to be inspired by an excerpt of poetry which is written below the title of each movement. The composer indicates three sections within the piece, labeled "A", "B", and "C". The text appears as such:

- (a.) For the first eight measures this melody reproduces exactly the song of a robin, heard during an entire summer. The beauty of tone and perfection of rhythmic accent suggested the performance of an accomplished flute-player.
- (b.) This melodic variation was occasionally introduced by the bird, but the key never changed.
- (c.) The song of the "Chewink," or "Ground-Robin".¹⁸⁷

Like the songs of the hermit thrush, the ground robin songs also have very predictable and symmetrical qualities. The examples below show the indicated measures in the printed score.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ Gail Smith ed., *The Life and Music of Amy Beach, "The First Woman Composer of America,"* (Pacific, MO: Mel Bay Publications, 1992), 83.

¹⁸⁸ Examples from printed score. *Ibid.*, 83-85.

First system of a piano score. It consists of two staves. The upper staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lower staff has a bass clef and the same key signature. The music is in 3/4 time. The first measure of the upper staff contains a triplet of eighth notes with a '3' above it. The first measure of the lower staff contains a triplet of eighth notes with a '3' below it. The dynamic marking '(a) p' is placed between the staves. The system ends with a double bar line.

Second system of a piano score, continuing from the first system. It consists of two staves. The upper staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lower staff has a bass clef and the same key signature. The music is in 3/4 time. The dynamic marking 'p' is placed between the staves. The system ends with a double bar line.

Third system of a piano score, consisting of two staves. The upper staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lower staff has a bass clef and the same key signature. The music is in 3/4 time. The first measure of the upper staff contains a triplet of eighth notes with a '3' below it. The first measure of the lower staff contains a triplet of eighth notes with a '3' below it. The dynamic marking 'p' is placed between the staves. The system ends with a double bar line.

Fourth system of a piano score, consisting of two staves. The upper staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lower staff has a bass clef and the same key signature. The music is in 3/4 time. The first measure of the upper staff contains a triplet of eighth notes with a '3' above it. The first measure of the lower staff contains a triplet of eighth notes with a '3' below it. The dynamic marking '(c) mf' is placed between the staves. The system ends with a double bar line.

The bird songs that Beach chose to incorporate in to her compositions also have a very melodic quality about them. The hermit thrush's song is extremely literal in its adherence to actual arpeggios within the musical system. Block states that each of these pieces "contain patches of tonal ambiguity, momentarily touching on a key, only to abruptly change to another, yet always connected through the logic of voice leading --- a typically post-Romantic procedure."¹⁸⁹ The composer highly valued and was focused on the exact replication of the bird calls through a musical system.

¹⁸⁹ Block, *Amy Beach*, 224.

Conclusion

Beach's music presents a unique marriage between derivative composition and adherence to individualized stylistic traits. Her capacity for self-study and inherent understanding of musical systems allowed her to compose at a level on par with well-established figures without the benefit of a formal music education. The most compelling works in her repertoire, although not her most famous, serve as a window in to Beach's individual being. While the same can be true for many composers regardless of psychological condition, behavioral traits, individual emotions and situational experiences, even something as simple as preference, are keys to understanding the creative works of all people.

The time and place in which Beach lived was also ideal for a female composer within that specific social climate. She was able to spend multiple hours in isolation due to her status and freedom from many household duties. Beach understood her place within the social hierarchy and eventually used this to her advantage. Due to the sheltered nature of her marital situation and the given social rules that came with it, it seems a likely environment for a composer to thrive. When this system began to change, the success of Beach's music dwindled as well. Beach eventually adapted to new social rules, but not without much effort and the external motivation of her personality and music being classified as passé by her peers.

North and Hargreaves discuss the topic of musical identity in *The Social and Applied Psychology of Music* (2008). They explicitly state,

[P]eople's developing musical identities have their origins in biological predispositions towards musicality, and that they are subsequently shaped by other people, groups, situations and social institutions that they encounter as they develop in a particular culture. . . . It holds out the promise of explaining

musical development 'from the inside' by trying to understand how individuals perceive and conceptualize their own musical development, which might itself be important in shaping that development.¹⁹⁰

This document has attempted to pinpoint these different aspects of Beach's individual and musical identity. Tying her behavioral characteristics to an ASD or any other psychological condition deemed by modern definition does not diminish her contribution to American music, but it seeks to provide a window into the composer's motivation for self expression through the musical systems available to her. Beach's tendencies toward exact replication of her natural surroundings, her ability to thrive in an isolated, yet highly controlled social dynamic setting, and her tendencies to express her emotions regarding her situation through a musical system are all telling traits of what we classify today as an ASD. Creating musical compositions can be considered a productive and acceptable form of self stimulation. Perhaps the unfolding drama of any piece of composed music or artistic work is a way of controlling human expression in a systemized, predictable manner not achievable in the course of real life and social situations.

Beach should not be remembered as an autistic composer but, rather, as a gifted woman who used her individual capabilities to her greatest advantage during her time. Bringing to light her autism-like behavioral traits only serves to better understand the composer's motivation, her desire to synthesize various musical elements and themes as a means of communicating dissatisfaction and the complications of her own suppression as an artist. Beach's presence, her successes,

¹⁹⁰ Adrian North and David Hargreaves, *The Social and Applied Psychology of Music*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 337-338.

and her failures served most certainly aided many composers of the female gender in their struggle for success in a male-dominated field. Her emotional expression, although perhaps inhibited by a communication disorder, was certainly expressed through her musical language.

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