



Courtesy photo by CHARTER WEEKS

Marie Harris plays the lead role in "Amy Beach in Words and Music," in honor of New Hampshire-born composer Amy Beach.



Photo courtesy of UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

The University of New Hampshire is celebrating the 150th anniversary of Amy Beach as the first American female composer.

Visibility & Voice

First American female composer Amy Beach

"We cannot live in a world that is not our own, in a world that is interpreted for us by others. An interpreted world is not a home. Part of the terror is to take back our own listening, to use our own voice, to see our own light."

- Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179)

Hildegard of Bingen, the first documented female composer, aptly describes the plight of the female and the female composer. Hildegard paved the way for all female composers who would follow her, including New Hampshire-born Amy Beach (1867-1944), the first American female composer and the first American composer to write a symphony - a prolific composer with more than 300 published works to her credit.

Music is one of the most powerful - and invisible - of the arts. It bypasses words, rational thought, and the conscious mind and reaches beneath the surface on its direct line to the brain where synapses create emotion. At the same



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time, it is invisible because it disappears as fast as it is created. Music dwells in instantaneous bits of memory.

Because it is instantaneous, usage is everything. Historically, what instruments musicians choose to play and the repertoire they choose determines our entire - and only - musical horizon.

Usage creates a "norm" - a kind of landscape of audio expectation shaped solely by who plays what most frequently. A norm, shaped by the stories we

tell, morphs into a "truth" - but it is only a partial truth. It is, as Hildegard wrote, an "interpreted" truth, passed along through a society, but it is only a snapshot of the entire truth.

Amy Beach, born in Henniker; was a celebrated composer in her day.

In 1882, when the Boston Handel & Haydn Society premiered her Mass in E Flat, Op. 5, it was the first time the Society had performed a work by a female composer in its 77-year history. In 1883, Beach's work was performed at the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition, one of six world fairs at which her works were performed, the last of which was the 1939 New York World's Fair.

In 1893, the Board of Lady Managers of the Fair commissioned Beach to write a choral work for the dedication of the women's building. Beach composed Jubilate, Op. 17, for a 300-voice women's chorus.

Later that year, at the Women's Musical Congress in Chicago, Beach performed her Romance for Piano and Violin, Op. 23, with Maud Powell, the most celebrated violinist of her time (regardless of gender) - to an audience of 4,000. Proceeds from one of her songs enabled Beach to purchase land for a summer home on Cape Cod. Welcomed as "one of the boys" by a group of nationally-known composers - Edward MacDowell, John Knowles Paine, Arthur Foote, Horatio Parker,

IF YOU GO

Marie Harris in "Amy Beach in Words and Music."

- Durham Public Library; 6:30 p.m. Dec. 18.
- Concord Library; March 6, 2018.
- Tucker Free Library, Henniker; 2 p.m. March 18, 2018.
- Cook Memorial Library, Tamworth; 7 p.m. July 18, 2018.

For further information, interested libraries may contact Marie at marie@marieharris.com Regarding the UNH exhibition, contact Dale Valena Dale.Valena@unh.edu.