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American Women Composers in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: A Comparison of the Social, Cultural and Personal Influences on the Lives, Career, and Music of Amy Beach and Ruth Crawford Seeger

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American Women Composers in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: A
Comparison of the Social, Cultural and Personal Influences on the Lives, Career, and Music of
Amy Beach and Ruth Crawford Seeger

by

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Abstract

A comparison of the lives and works of two American women composers, Amy Beach and Ruth Crawford Seeger, provides an interesting look at the role of women in music in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Amy Beach and Ruth Crawford Seeger were pioneers in American music during the time period after the Civil War through World War II. Both women performed professionally, composed, and innovated musical ideas and theories during a time when women's compositions were not widely performed or published. Their professional and personal lives illustrate many differences that informed their works in different ways. Amy Beach grew up a piano prodigy in an important New England household. Her marriage to Dr. H.H.A. Beach at eighteen allowed her to spend the first half of her life with no other responsibilities except composition. While Ruth Crawford Seeger did not have as much musical training as a child, she did have the opportunity to attend the American Conservatory of Music in Chicago. For her experimental compositions, she received the first Guggenheim Fellowship awarded to a woman. Their musical works demonstrate their shared struggles while highlighting the differences in the ways they found success despite having little opportunity to do so. Amy Beach's most famous work, her *Gaelic Symphony*, was the first by an American woman to premiere in the U.S. and demonstrates Beach's traditional Romantic roots (encouraged by her husband, while Crawford Seeger's innovative String Quartet 1931 is indicative of her highly modern style and utilizes many progressive techniques. Both women were able to find success due to a number of factors, including parental support, time, and male confidants. Their contributions to music theory and history are immense, including progressive serialist techniques and writings on theory and composition. They remain important figures and influential role models to aspiring women composers even today and serve as an example of the continued importance of equality in music education, composition and history.

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Amy Beach: Life and Works, 1867-1944

Amy Marcy Cheney was born in West Henniker, New Hampshire in 1867.¹ Amy was born to a middle class farming family, her father one in a long line of men who milled paper. However, it was her mother that first noticed and fostered her daughter's musical growth. Her mother, Clara, was a brilliant pianist and her maternal grandmother, Marcy, often performed at church in the choir. However, neither could anticipate nor even match the talent of young Amy. At only one year old, Amy was able to sing forty songs and improvise harmony to her mother's soprano by the age of two.² By four, she was composing simple melodies. However, her mother remained adamant that Amy grow up as a normal child, a musician rather than a prodigy. She did not begin piano lessons until age six, when her mother finally agreed to give her lessons. It was clear that there was no hiding her abilities and denying her status as a prodigy did not change the fact. Around the same time, the Cheney family moved to Boston. It was here that Amy's musical training and career began to take off.

Boston was the ideal place for an aspiring American composer or musician to begin their career. The local symphony was one of the best in the country at the time, often premiering works by the nation's foremost composer as well as the newest works from Europe's leading composers such as Brahms and Dvorak. Support for the arts was strong among the community of activists, professionals, intellectuals and the famous publisher, Arthur Schmidt. Amy's ability grew exponentially as she grew older and she soon outgrew her mother's teaching. During her

¹ Adrienne Fried Block, "Amy Beach, 1867-1944," Naxos Classical Music, http://www.naxos.com/person/Amy_Beach_20926/20926.htm (accessed January 5, 2015).

² *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. "Amy Marcy Beach" (by Adrienne Fried Block & E. Douglas Bomberger), <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/A2248268> (accessed December 15, 2014).

youth, she studied with two teachers in the Boston area, Ernst Perabo and Carl Baermann. By the time she was only 16 years old, Amy was performing a piano concerto with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, as the featured soloist.³ Rave reviews for her debut performance poured in, but Amy had her eyes set on a loftier goal, particularly for a proper, young lady at the time: composing.

Although she did not begin seriously composing and studying until age seventeen, the world of composition was not an entirely new one to Amy. She composed short waltzes on the piano as a young girl, even before she had the ability to write them out in musical notation. After the family's move to Boston, Amy was able to take one year of harmony and counterpoint lessons with Junius Welch Hill, which was the most training that young girls at the time were allowed to receive.⁴ She turned to composition more seriously shortly after her performance debut at age sixteen and her lessons with Hill. Her early pieces were short piano pieces and parlor songs, typical of the time. "With Violets," written during lessons when she was only fifteen, demonstrated Amy's natural talent for intriguing harmonies and her ability to turn a parlor song into an art song. As Amy's desire to compose grew, her parents sought advice as to where she should continue her studies, since music conservatories at the time were closed to women in the area of composition. Unfortunately, no composition teacher would take on Amy as a student; At the suggestion of Wilhelm Gericke, conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, she began studying the scores and treatises of the great European composers such as

³ Richard Crawford, *America's Musical Life: A History* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2001), 364.

⁴ Walter Jenkins, *The Remarkable Mrs. Beach, American Composer* (Warren, Michigan: Harmonie Park Press, 1994), 22.

Bach and Berlioz.⁵ Despite the fact that she was unable to receive the same compositional training as her male counterparts, Amy proved her intelligence and talent by successfully being her own composition teacher, a feat unheard of even today.

Amy was able to devote all of her time and energy to composition and study after her marriage at the age of eighteen to Dr. Henry H.A. Beach.⁶ Dr. Beach was a wealthy, respected professional in Boston who provided Amy with everything she needed to study and work on her compositions. In fact, at the onset of their marriage, Amy made an agreement to her husband that she would concentrate on composition rather than performance for the next 25 years, and her husband agreed to provide her with the means to do so.⁷ An unusual arrangement, to say the least, but it allowed Amy the time to hone her craft and compose prolifically during their marriage. By 1889, she had composed her first large-scale work, *Mass in E-flat*. The publication and premiere of this large-scale work was a major event in the city's musical world. The *Mass* premiered at a concert of the Handel and Haydn Society in 1892 to an overwhelmingly positive response. However, reviews also continued to note the limitations and ability of a woman to compose a large work, backhandedly complimenting Beach for overcoming such struggles.⁸ Her colleagues in Boston, though, were genuinely impressed by the abilities of the young, untrained musician. Her *Mass in E-flat* gained Amy a place in the Second New England School, also called the Boston Classicists. This was a group of well-known composers who emerged in

⁵ Steven Haller, "Beach: Gaelic Symphony; Piano Concerto," *American Record Guide* 66, no. 5 (September, 2003): 73. *General OneFile*. EBSCOhost. <http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy2.otterbein.edu> (accessed February 16, 2015).

⁶ Karin Pendle, *Women in Music: A History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 220.

⁷ Adrienne Fried Block, "Amy Beach, 1867-1944," Naxos Classical Music, http://www.naxos.com/person/Amy_Beach_20926/20926.htm (accessed January 5, 2015).

⁸ Karin Pendle, *Women in Music: A History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 213.

Boston in the late 19th and early 20th century. The group consisted of primarily men who worked in teaching positions at local universities and composed primarily in the German style. While these men greatly admired and respected her work, Beach was left out of much of the fraternal bonding of discussions and performances due to the fact that it was improper for a woman.⁹

While the Mass in E-flat opened many doors for Amy Beach, nothing could compare to the effects and influence of her most famous and acclaimed work, Symphony in E Minor (*Gaelic*). After successfully conquering many kinds of smaller works, such as choral pieces, art songs, and piano chamber music, and riding on the heels of the success of the Mass, Beach decided to undertake the ultimate test of a composer's talent and stamina: the symphony. For hundreds of years, the symphony had been the measuring tool by which every composer was evaluated by the public and critics alike. However, Beach was once again breaking down barriers in her mere attempt at creating the ultimate large-scale work. Few women had ever composed symphonies, and it was generally accepted that they simply did not have the intelligence or ability due to their womanly limitations. As George Trumball Ladd put it in his infamous "Why Women Cannot Compose Music," they could not compose because they were unable to "command the concentration, the will or the stamina to create significant, consciously-crafted works of art."¹⁰ Unfazed by the opinions of others, Beach began work on her symphony in 1894, not long after the premiere and success of her Mass. Two events influenced Beach's decision to begin work on a symphony as well as the kind of symphony she composed. The first was Anton Dvorak's call for American composers to create their own sort of nationalistic music, which was a popular technique at the time in Europe. The second was the premiere of Dvorak's

⁹ Richard Crawford, *America's Musical Life: A History* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2001), 353.

¹⁰ Jennifer Swinger Thomas, "Two American Composers of the Early 20th Century: Amy Cheney Beach and Ruth Crawford Seeger," *The Journal of American Culture* 5 (1982): 27.

own “New World” symphony in New York in 1893, based heavily on themes from Native American and African-American music.¹¹ Beach created her own take on nationalistic music with her *Symphony in E Minor*, which was built on folk tunes from Ireland and England. Because of this, it is more commonly known as the *Gaelic Symphony*. The Boston Symphony Orchestra premiered the piece in 1896 to much anticipation from the public, the Second New England School, and music critics.¹² The response from critics was generally favorable, echoing much of the same sentiments as her *Mass*. However, it was accepted with overwhelming positivity from the public and her colleagues in the Second New England School. One of these composers, George Chadwick, deemed her symphony “a composition fine enough to make her one of the boys.”¹³ Amy Beach reached the epitome of what was possible for a woman composer and beyond, gaining the respect of her colleagues and the public along the way.

After the success of her *Gaelic Symphony*, Amy Beach continued to write many remarkable works, including a piano concerto and works for choir. Her life changed drastically at the death of her husband in 1910 after twenty-five years of marriage.¹⁴ For the first time, Beach was free to compose or perform as she pleased. She soon hired a manager and traveled to Europe, where she toured extensively, spending much time in Germany. Eventually, Amy returned home to Boston to a welcoming crowd, eager to hear new work and a brilliant performance from Beach, who had rarely performed in Boston during her marriage. In the twenty years following, Beach would move from Boston to San Francisco to New Hampshire to

¹¹ Adrienne Fried Block, *Amy Beach: Passionate Victorian* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 87-88.

¹² *Ibid*, 100.

¹³ Richard Crawford, *America’s Musical Life: A History* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2001), 353.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 364.

New York, gaining followers and fans along the way. During the summer of 1921, she spent time at the MacDowell Colony for composers, at which she composed some of her finest piano works. These latest works had a more modern style, with increased chromaticism and even Impressionist techniques.¹⁵ By the end of her life in 1944, Amy Beach had done and been it all: teacher, performer, and composer. As Pendle put it, she “became a heroine to American women, her example a beacon to light the way for a coming generation of female composers.”¹⁶

¹⁵ *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. “Amy Marcy Beach” (by Adrienne Fried Block & E. Douglas Bomberger), <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/A2248268> (accessed December 15, 2014).

¹⁶ Karin Pendle, *Women in Music: A History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 222.

Ruth Crawford Seeger: Life and Works, 1901-1953

Ruth Crawford Seeger, like Amy Beach, broke new ground for women composers in American music history. She was born Ruth Porter Crawford on July 3, 1901 in East Liverpool, Ohio.¹⁷ Ruth was not born into a wealthy, high-status family like many other female musicians of the time; her father, Clark Crawford, was a Methodist minister who frequently served different communities. Her early years were filled with instability as her family moved from state to state, following the lead of her strictly religious father. Although not the prodigy that Beach was, Ruth was always drawn to all of the arts, including music and poetry. Her mother, Clara, recognized Ruth's affinity for music and allowed her to take piano lessons at age six. This went against the conventions of the time and the thoughts of Ruth's father, who believed almost everything outside of the church to be frivolous. Clara Crawford strove to raise Ruth within the rules of conventional domesticity while at the same time giving her opportunities not afforded to herself as a young girl.¹⁸ In effect, she was "learning the old and the new at the same time."¹⁹ These ideas would later influence Ruth's musical works as well. Mrs. Crawford remained an important figure in her daughter's life until her death, as well as her greatest musical supporter.

A long line of influential teachers and educational opportunities began to shape Ruth Crawford's ideas about composition and performance during her high school and college years. In high school, Ruth was a jack-of-all-trades, equally as comfortable with writing poetry as she was with playing piano. In fact, at one point, Ruth seriously considered becoming an "authoress

¹⁷ *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. "Ruth Crawford (Seeger)" (by Judith Tick), <http://www.grovemusic.com/> (accessed January 5, 2015).

¹⁸ Judith Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer's Search for American Music* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 29.

or poetess,” as she explained in one of her diaries.²⁰ However, it was during this time that she would begin studying piano with the first in a long line of important teachers, Valborg Collett.²¹ Her talent and passion for music began to grow, and she began working as a concert pianist around Jacksonville, Florida after graduating from high school. She also took on her first of many teaching positions, giving piano lessons to local students. It was here that Ruth wrote her first simple compositions, which were short piano studies for her students. However, Ruth soon became anxious to join the ranks of the other aspiring performers and composers of her day and receive formal conservatory training. In 1921, Ruth and her mother moved to Chicago, where she enrolled in the American Conservatory of Music, hoping to receive her piano teaching certification.²² Three decades after Amy Beach’s debut and women were still generally discouraged from a career solely in composition.

Ruth Crawford’s time in Chicago proved to be the most important and influential time in her life with regards to the creation of her unique compositional style and ideas on music theory and performance. From the beginning of her education, Ruth was a champion of the idea and presence of women in the music world. Soon after beginning her studies, she transferred teachers and began studying piano with Louise Robyn, in her opinion the “only woman teacher to have real standing among the men” at the conservatory.²³ Not content with just performing music, however, Ruth was greatly interested in all of her classes, from music history to music theory. In fact, it was during her second year at the conservatory that Ruth’s interest in

²⁰ Ibid, 12.

²¹ Ibid, 17-18.

²² David Lewis, “Ruth Crawford Seeger Biography,” Peggy Seeger, <http://www.peggyseeger.com/ruth-crawford-seeger/ruth-crawford-seeger-biography> (accessed January 19, 2015).

²³ Judith Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer’s Search for American Music* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 33.

composition began to take off, under the tutelage of her music composition and theory teacher, Adolf Weidig.²⁴ Notoriously difficult to please, even Weidig was impressed with Ruth's early compositions in his class and he encouraged her to pursue it, even going as far as giving her composition lessons. Under his instruction, Ruth wrote the first piece of her music to be given professional performance in 1925, her Second Prelude for Piano.²⁵ Ruth Crawford stayed in Chicago until 1929, pursuing her master's degree and further refining her composition and unique musical style. Another influential teacher during this time was one of Ruth's piano teachers and dear friend, Djane Herz.²⁶ Herz was an extremely influential voice in the Chicago music scene at the time, as well as somewhat of a leader of a group of modernist composers that would come to include most of Ruth's closest friends. She considered herself a disciple of Scriabin, and introduced Ruth to the ultra-modern style of the Russian composer. Scriabin's ideas on mysticism and spirituality especially appealed to Ruth, who found the same sort of "transcendental modernism" in the poems of Whitman, her favorite author.²⁷ She continued to idolize and emulate Scriabin throughout most of her compositional career; when asked about her greatest influences, she explained, "Bach: another great soul. He and Scriabin are to me by far the greatest spirits born to music."²⁸ An unlikely pair, but part of Ruth's strength as a composer was doing just that: continuing to combine old ideas with the new.

²⁴ David Lewis, "Ruth Crawford Seeger Biography," Peggy Seeger, <http://www.peggyseeger.com/ruth-crawford-seeger/ruth-crawford-seeger-biography> (accessed January 19, 2015).

²⁵ *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. "Ruth Crawford (Seeger)" (by Judith Tick), <http://www.grovemusic.com/> (accessed January 5, 2015).

²⁶ Karin Pendle, *Women in Music: A History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 320.

²⁷ Judith Tick, "Ruth Crawford's Spiritual Concept: The Sound-Ideals of an Early American Modernist, 1924-1930," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 44, no. 2 (Summer, 1991): 222. *Jstor*. Otterbein University Libraries. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/831604>.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 232.

The 1930s brought changes to Ruth Crawford's life as well as the pinnacle of her career. In 1929, she spent time at the famous MacDowell colony for composers, where Amy Beach also frequented along with many other prolific composers of the time. After her summer at the colony, Ruth moved to New York at the encouragement of her friend, Henry Cowell. She met Henry through Herz, and he believed Ruth to be a brilliant talent. He paid her the ultimate compliment of the time by equating her work to that done by male composers: "Her work of deep beauty is at the level of highest accomplishment that men realize. She is the only female composer, that I know of, of which I can say this."²⁹ Cowell arranged for performances of her music in New York, and she had also been told of a brilliant composition teacher with whom she wanted to study with by the name of Charles Seeger. Charles Seeger was the leading figure in dissonant counterpoint, an ultra-modern technique which Ruth was fascinated with. Charles did eventually take Ruth on as a student, but not without some hesitance. He initially did not feel that she was "worthy," of being a composition student because she was a female.³⁰ During this time, Ruth's compositions were becoming more and more mature and daring, and she was more prolific in her writing than ever. After only a few months of study with Charles Seeger, it was announced that Ruth had won a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1930.³¹ She was the first woman to receive the fellowship, which allowed her to study composition in Europe. While in Europe, Crawford was able to study with many of the greatest modern composers of the day, including Bartok and Berg. Also while in Europe, she composed her most famous and influential piece:

²⁹ Judith Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer's Search for American Music* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 50-51.

³⁰ Jennifer Swinger Thomas, "Two American Composers of the Early 20th Century: Amy Cheney Beach and Ruth Crawford Seeger," *The Journal of American Culture* 5 (1982): 30.

³¹ *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. "Ruth Crawford (Seeger)" (by Judith Tick), <http://www.grovemusic.com/> (accessed January 5, 2015).

String Quartet 1931. Called “distinguished, a noble piece of work,” by even the toughest of music critics, the String Quartet broke new compositional ground in many ways.³² The Quartet was the epitome of Ruth’s works and ideas, utilizing dissonances more than consonances and taking serialism to new heights. She was one of the first to serialize aspects of a piece other than the notes, which would later become popular in Europe thanks to the works of modernist composers such as Schoenberg. The most unique thing about String Quartet 1931 was her use of “counterpoint of dynamics,” in which the dynamics of the piece were treated with rules and serialized like pitches typically were.³³ This created an unusual effect of waves of dissonance throughout the piece. With the composition of this piece, Ruth Crawford cemented her standing as one of the leading modernist composers of the day, as well as an important figure in music history.

Ruth continued to have great success throughout the rest of her life, albeit not always in the world of composition. After returning home from her trip through Europe, Ruth married Charles Seeger in 1932.³⁴ She would, from then on, go by the name Ruth Crawford Seeger professionally. The following year her *Three Songs* for oboe, contralto, piano and percussion was chosen to represent the United States at the International Society of Contemporary Music Festival in the Netherlands, another high honor for any composer.³⁵ *Three Songs* continued Ruth’s legacy of pushing boundaries, using experimental techniques such as Sprechstimme that

³² Ibid.

³³ Craig Wright and Bryan Simms, *Music in Western Civilization Volume C: Romanticism to the Present* (Belmont, CA: Thomson Schirmer, 2006), 694.

³⁴ David Lewis, “Ruth Crawford Seeger Biography,” Peggy Seeger, <http://www.peggyseeger.com/ruth-crawford-seeger/ruth-crawford-seeger-biography> (accessed January 19, 2015).

³⁵ Judith Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer’s Search for American Music* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 184.

would not be widely utilized until decades later.³⁶ However, it was to be one of the last important modern compositions of Ruth's career. After her marriage to Charles Seeger, Ruth changed her focus from composition to that of music education and preservation. She became highly interested in American folk music, even publishing her own arrangements of many of these folk songs for children and adults alike. In 1936, she began working with the Archive of American Folk Song to help catalogue and preserve American music for generations to come.³⁷ Crawford Seeger also began to focus on her family, which included step-children from Charles' previous marriage as well as her own biological children. After a brief return to her modernist compositions, Ruth Crawford Seeger died from cancer in 1953. Her influence on contemporary compositions as well as American folk music, however, continues to live on.

³⁶ Karin Pendle, *Women in Music: A History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 321.

³⁷ *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. "Ruth Crawford (Seeger)" (by Judith Tick), <http://www.grovemusic.com/> (accessed January 5, 2015).

Comparison of Professional Career and Accomplishments

Throughout history, prominent female composers have been few and far between. One can count most of the famous ones on one hand, and the majority of those did not rise to fame on their own but through the success of a brother or spouse. In American music history, the names of well-known female composers are even fewer. These composers not only had to overcome judgment because of their gender but also the European idea of the inferiority of American classical composers in the 19th and early 20th centuries, particularly American women composers.³⁸ Amy Beach and Ruth Crawford Seeger are two women who rose above the rest and were able to leave their mark on music history, theory and composition. However, it is interesting to see just how different their professional lives, personal lives and the opportunities offered to them were, even just a few decades apart from one another. The musical styles of the two women could also not be more different, one being almost neo-classical and the other ultra-modern and experimental. Yet, it is easy to see the shared struggles the two had to overcome to follow their dreams and make a name for themselves. It also serves as a reminder of our responsibility to include these women in our history books and recognize them for the contributions to music today.

Professionally, Ruth Crawford Seeger and Amy Beach took very different paths in their respective careers. The differences begin with their educational training. Amy Beach, a prodigy since she was a young child, began piano lessons as a young girl. However, she took them simply from her mother rather than an outside teacher until she was a teenager. In fact, Amy was such a natural prodigy that she did not need much instruction in the way of performance. Her mother's instruction was her own way of keeping Amy grounded; Mrs. Cheney strived to help

³⁸ Jennifer Swinger Thomas, "Two American Composers of the Early 20th Century: Amy Cheney Beach and Ruth Crawford Seeger," *The Journal of American Culture* 5 (1982): 28-29.

Amy be a “musician, not a prodigy.”³⁹ Amy never had many formal piano teachers throughout her life and relied on her own abilities and knowledge to get her through, which were admittedly quite impressive. Ruth Crawford Seeger also began piano lessons at the age of six at the prompting of her mother. However, Ruth continued lessons with various teachers throughout her youth, adolescence and into college.⁴⁰ Her abilities as a performer were not as great as Amy’s, yet it is clear that her interest in music was slightly more accepted as a serious career path by Ruth’s time. This is also evidenced by her conservatory training. When Amy Beach took an interest in composition, there was no teacher willing to accept her as a student. At the end of the 19th century, composition was considered a male’s occupation almost exclusively, even for supremely talented, well-off young women such as Amy. Piano performance was acceptable, as it was deemed an appropriate activity for wealthy young ladies, a social skill that would further them in the ranks of the middle- and upper-classes.⁴¹ However, the rave reviews for her performances would not persuade any of the composition teachers at the local university to even consider taking Beach on as a student, and thus she was forced to study and learn herself. Crawford Seeger, on the other hand, was easily accepted into the American Conservatory in Chicago. Granted, she did enter as a piano performance and education student rather than a composition student.⁴² However, the simple fact that Ruth was allowed to study at the

³⁹ Adrienne Fried Block, *Amy Beach: Passionate Victorian* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 7.

⁴⁰ *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. “Ruth Crawford (Seeger)” (by Judith Tick), <http://www.grovemusic.com/> (accessed January 5, 2015).

⁴¹ *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. “Women in Music” (by Judith Tick, Margaret Ericson, and Ellen Koskoff), <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/52554> (accessed January 7, 2015).

⁴² David Lewis, “Ruth Crawford Seeger Biography,” Peggy Seeger, <http://www.peggyseeger.com/ruth-crawford-seeger/ruth-crawford-seeger-biography> (accessed January 19, 2015).

conservatory made a huge difference in her professional life in comparison with that of Amy Beach.

Despite their differences with regards to their education, there are many similarities to the professional careers of Amy Beach and Ruth Crawford Seeger. First of all, they both were denied entry to some form of lessons or education due to the fact that they were women. While Ruth Crawford Seeger did study at the American Conservatory in Chicago, she was only accepted as a piano student hoping to study performance and education. At the time, it was still rare for a composition teacher or a composition program at a conservatory to accept a female student. Crawford Seeger learned much of her initial knowledge about composition through her theory and composition classes required of every music major. She was not permitted to study independently. This was similar to Amy Beach's own struggles to find a composition teacher willing to take her. She had to go as far as teaching herself harmony and counterpoint without assistance, using scores and classic treatises on theory. Also, both Crawford Seeger and Beach were educated entirely within the United States. While Crawford Seeger did receive the Guggenheim Fellowship in 1930, she did not extensively study with any European composers during her time, nor did either of the two women spend any of their initial formal study in Europe. This went against the norm, for any serious composer in the 19th and 20th centuries was expected to travel to Europe for instruction.⁴³ Another similarity that both Beach and Crawford Seeger shared was the friendship and support of a small group of fellow composers. Amy Beach received support and encouragement from the Second New England School, particularly George Chadwick. Chadwick was quoted as saying that Beach's compositions were good enough to make her "one of the boys," a compliment that also made Beach a credible composer in the eyes

⁴³ Craig Wright and Bryan Simms, *Music in Western Civilization Volume C: Romanticism to the Present* (Belmont, CA: Thomson Schirmer, 2006), 694.

of the critics.⁴⁴ Henry Cowell, similarly, did the same for Ruth, publicly praising her abilities and arranging for performances of her music in New York.⁴⁵ Both women spent time at the MacDowell Colony as well, working alongside some of their contemporaries and possibly even each other. Finally, both women gained international attention, a feat not easily achieved at the time by any woman or man in music. With Beach's *Gaelic Symphony* premiere by the Boston Symphony Orchestra and Crawford Seeger's String Quartet 1931 (written in Europe), both women commanded attention from the musical world.

Tracing the professional lives of Amy Beach and Ruth Crawford Seeger reveals interesting patterns and commentary on society as a whole, even though the women rose to prominence a few centuries apart from one another. By the 1920's and 1930's some barriers were beginning to break down, as evidenced by Ruth's acceptance into a music conservatory, an unthinkable action during the late 19th century when Amy was in her prime. The sheer fact that Adolph Wiedig encouraged Ruth's compositions and viewed her as an exceptional talent proves that tides were beginning to turn, even if they were turning slowly. However, some of the similarities between the careers of both women point to the continuing struggles that women in the field of composition were facing. Neither was allowed to study composition independently and as their primary field of study. Most telling is the fact the both women had male encouragement and supporters. This shows that even though their compositions should have been enough to gain them credibility as a composer, they needed the validity and approval of respected male musicians to improve their chances of being taken seriously and being accepted in the composition world. Despite all of this, the way that both women were able to break down

⁴⁴ Richard Crawford, *America's Musical Life: A History* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2001), 353.

⁴⁵ David Lewis, "Ruth Crawford Seeger Biography," Peggy Seeger, <http://www.peggyseeger.com/ruth-crawford-seeger/ruth-crawford-seeger-biography> (accessed January 19, 2015).

barriers was remarkable. Amy Beach was the first American woman to compose a symphony and have it performed by a professional music ensemble.⁴⁶ Ruth Crawford Seeger was the first woman to win the Guggenheim Fellowship, giving her the opportunity to share her music with Europe. While the various elements of their educational and professional lives certainly contributed to these accomplishments, the nuances and circumstances surrounding their personal lives and upbringings may have been even more influential.

⁴⁶ Richard Crawford, *America's Musical Life: A History* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2001), 364.

Comparison of Personal Lives and the Influence on Compositional Career

A look at the professional careers of Amy Beach and Ruth Crawford Seeger reveals a lot of important aspects of their success as composers. It is clear that both women were supremely talented musicians who were denied many opportunities. However, it was their talent and perseverance that helped them to break down the barriers and accomplish many unique achievements. However, focusing only on the professional and educational parts of their lives and careers does not truly provide the whole picture. Much of their success, ideas and opportunities are a result of differences in their personal lives. Parental influence, marriage, and their own personal ideas and values played a large part in the trajectory of each woman's career and their ability to rise above the challenges. In order to truly understand and compare the works and accomplishments of Beach and Crawford Seeger, their personal lives must be considered alongside their professional similarities and differences.

The influence of Beach's and Crawford Seeger's parents on their careers and successes cannot be overlooked. Amy Beach's parents played a large role in the formative years of their daughter's education. Clara Cheney, her mother, recognized Amy's talent as a toddler, when the little girl would harmonize to the simple folk songs that she sang to her. However, Clara was adamant that Amy would become a musician and not a prodigy. Had Beach been a boy, it is possible that her mother and father would have approached her gift differently. They would have been more likely to encourage her to compose and perform from a very young age, as there was never any objection to a boy becoming a prodigy. However, Beach was not allowed to take lessons until the age of six, and even then, they were taught by her mother. It is difficult to say, but all of this objection to Amy's prodigious talent could possibly have set the tone for the rest of her career, in which Beach was always careful and content to simply be an amateur musician,

never intentionally pushing the boundaries too far.⁴⁷ On the other hand, her parents did not completely discourage young Amy, and they did recognize that she had a natural talent for music. When she was a teenager, they arranged all of her performances and even fought to find her a composition teacher, to no avail.⁴⁸ Ruth Crawford Seeger's parents had a similar effect on their daughter, both encouraging and stifling her talent in different ways. Crawford Seeger's father, a strict Methodist preacher, did not encourage "superfluities," such as Ruth's interest in the arts.⁴⁹ However, her mother, also named Clara, saw Ruth's potential and worked to encourage it after Mr. Crawford's death. She found Ruth a number of piano teachers and followed her daughter to Chicago when she was accepted into the American Conservatory. She raised Ruth to respect and strive for the conventional qualities of domesticity, but at the same time, she wanted more opportunities for her daughter than had been given to her.⁵⁰ Her encouragement was paramount in her daughter's early success.

There was arguably no greater influence on the lives of both women than marriage and the views of their spouses. In some ways, the effect of marriage on the careers of Ruth Crawford Seeger and Amy Beach was similar. Both women had more opportunities and freedom during the time in which they were not married. For Amy Beach, this time was after her husband, Dr. Henry Beach, passed away. Dr. Beach was much older than Amy, who married him at only

⁴⁷ Laurel Keddie Verissimo, "Amy Beach: Her Life, Times and Music," (Master's diss., San Jose State University, 1993), 25.

⁴⁸ Adrienne Fried Block, *Amy Beach: Passionate Victorian* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 38-40.

⁴⁹ Judith Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer's Search for American Music* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 4.

eighteen years old.⁵¹ When he passed, for the first time, Amy was able to make her own decisions regarding her career. She traveled frequently, composing and performing at will. Ruth Crawford Seeger experienced this sort of success and freedom before her marriage, as she married Charles Seeger at age thirty-one. She had many of her pieces performed by professional ensembles, spent time at the MacDowell Colony, and spent time in Europe on her Guggenheim Fellowship all before 1932, when she settled down and married Seeger.⁵² After her marriage to Seeger, Ruth's composing career slowed down drastically. Instead of composing full time, she began her duties as a housewife and mother to Charles' children from a previous marriage as well as their own children together. There is no evidence to point to the fact that Charles necessarily discouraged her composing, and she found a new passion in arranging and collecting folk songs after the family's move to Washington D.C. However, it is clear that, like Beach, Crawford Seeger's marriage changed her career trajectory drastically. The difference between the lives of the two women and their relationships with their husbands, however, comes in the lifestyles that they lived. Charles Seeger, like Ruth, was a musician and composer, as well as a highly innovative and sought after composition teacher. They lived a comfortable life and remained an important family in the world of music theory, composition and preservation at the time. It seems that Ruth simply found little time for composing after her marriage when she had many more responsibilities to keep her busy, as a wife and mother. Amy Beach, on the other hand, had a very unique situation during her marriage to Dr. Beach. He encouraged Amy to focus solely on composing and would not allow her to perform professionally, apart from charity events on occasion. The Beaches were quite wealthy and held a high social position in the

⁵¹ Richard Crawford, *America's Musical Life: A History* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2001), 364.

⁵² *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. "Ruth Crawford (Seeger)" (by Judith Tick), <http://www.grovemusic.com/> (accessed January 5, 2015).

Boston community, and therefore Amy Beach had the luxury of spending all of her free time studying, reading and composing. While this allowed her a unique opportunity to hone her craft, many have pointed out that it may have stifled her personal growth as a composer and her ability as a performer.⁵³

Finally, the personal beliefs and ideas of both women, though differing in many ways, was a large factor in their individual success. The differences also highlight the ways in which the general idea of women and feminism was changing throughout the early twentieth century. Amy Beach was much more traditional than Ruth Crawford Seeger in many ways. Beach was a product of her times and her upbringing,⁵⁴ a true proper, upper-class lady of the nineteenth century. She came from a long line of distinguished, talented ancestors who instilled in her the “Yankee will power,” which she would credit as an important key to her success.⁵⁵ She considered herself a “nice and proper married Bostonian woman,” who also happened to be one of the nation’s leading composers.⁵⁶ She frequently wrote about the importance of domesticity in a woman’s life, and she backed up her claims by using the title “Mrs. H.H.A. Beach,” professionally during and even after her husband’s death.⁵⁷ Even her music was quite proper, staying primarily in the style of the late Romantics such as Brahms. However, while Beach formally embraced tradition, her actions were radical for the time. On occasion, she would

⁵³ Judith Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer’s Search for American Music* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), vii.

⁵⁴ Walter Jenkins, *The Remarkable Mrs. Beach, American Composer* (Warren, Michigan: Harmonie Park Press, 1994), 3.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 4.

⁵⁶ Richard Crawford, *America’s Musical Life: A History* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2001), 371.

⁵⁷ Adrienne Fried Block, “Amy Beach, 1867-1944,” Naxos Classical Music, http://www.naxos.com/person/Amy_Beach_20926/20926.htm (accessed January 5, 2015).

recognize her limits and reveal a glimpse of the frustration that surely followed her. While she agreed that women were limited musically, she wrote that it was because “music is the expression of life experiences, which are denied to women because of their position.”⁵⁸ Without realizing it, or even trying to, Amy Beach became a feminist hero in the world of composition. By the 1920s and 1930s, the women’s movement was beginning to gain more ground. Ruth Crawford Seeger’s more modern ideals are a sign of the times and a glimpse into the personality that helped her to persevere through the setbacks and barriers. She also bridged the gap between traditional and progressive, leaning more towards the progressive than Beach ever did. Ruth was never afraid to speak her mind and express her thoughts and opinions, often through music. She even used her music to make a political point; for example, her art song, “Chinese Laundryman,” written in 1932, addressed the oppressive conditions and exploitation faced by Chinese immigrants at the time.⁵⁹ This was a bold move for anyone, but even more so for a woman, whose opinions and view were not deemed as important as a man’s, nor were they typically expressed in public. Crawford Seeger’s music also reflected her progressive views and unique personality. It was ultra-modern and experimental, again going against the grain of what women composers were expected to do.⁶⁰ However, she had a reflective nature and keen insight when it came to her composing and writing and was careful to be bold without being destructive. As one

⁵⁸ Adrienne Fried Block, *Amy Beach: Passionate Victorian* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 73.

⁵⁹ Charles Hiroshi Garrett, *Struggling to Define a Nation: American Music and the 20th Century* (Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2008), 149.

⁶⁰ Judith Tick, “Ruth Crawford’s Spiritual Concept: The Sound-Ideals of an Early American Modernist, 1924-1930,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 44, no. 2 (Summer, 1991): 221. *Jstor*. Otterbein University Libraries. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/831604>.

musicologist puts it, Ruth “understood tradition through a modernist perspective, finding affinities that linked the very old with the very new.”⁶¹

It is clear that the varying circumstances of their personal lives certainly affected and influenced the professional accomplishments of Amy Beach and Ruth Crawford Seeger. The differences between the two are stark and contrasting; Amy was traditional in every sense of the word, while Ruth dared to have more progressive ideas. Dr. Beach almost forced Amy to compose during their marriage, while Ruth almost abandoned the career when she started a family with Charles. The list of unique circumstances goes on, and the two women can appear more different than alike. However, both were able to do what so many others never could. They broke down the inherent barriers of their womanhood and made a name for themselves in a male-dominated field. They contributed much to the field of composition, theory and music history. For these reasons alone, it is fascinating to evaluate and compare the two rare successes of women in American music history.

⁶¹ Karin Pendle, *Women in Music: A History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 319.

Comparison of Musical Styles Based on Most Famous Work

While it is clear that both Amy Beach and Ruth Crawford Seeger were talented individuals who accomplished much in their lives, these professional and personal elements do not fully describe the important musical contributions the women made to the field of theory and composition. In fact, it is impossible to understand and talk about the lasting effects of their work with discussing the styles and influences of their musical compositions. They were not simply mediocre composers who are remembered simply for their accomplishments as women, but they were also innovative and creative musicians. By examining Amy Beach's *Gaelic Symphony* and Ruth Crawford Seeger's *String Quartet 1931*, one can begin to understand their innovations and influences within the context of musical style and compositional techniques.

Amy Beach's *Gaelic Symphony* is a product of the times and influenced heavily by some of the most prominent European composers while still managing to be innovative in many ways. When Beach began work on her symphony, she had already achieved major success with her previous large-scale work, *Mass in E-flat*. However, Beach was not content to sit back and coast on her past successes, although they were quite remarkable. She began work on her symphony in the early 1890s, inspired by none other than Anton Dvorak. Dvorak, a major proponent of the new popular style of incorporating folk songs into classical music, wrote an article recommending that American composers create nationalist music.⁶² Since no composers immediately responded to his suggestions, he took it upon himself to write his own music using what he considered to be American folk tunes. The *New World Symphony* premiered in New York in 1893 to rave reviews and much publicity; the piece borrowed heavily from Native American and African-American folk melodies, which Dvorak believed to be the true folk music

⁶² Adrienne Fried Block, *Amy Beach: Passionate Victorian* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 87.

of our country.⁶³ These two events prompted and encouraged Amy Beach to respond to Dvorak's call with her own form of nationalist music, using what she believed to be the heritage and folk music of the American people. Since many of the people living in New England at the time were of Anglo-Saxon heritage, Beach drew from the folk songs of England and Ireland. Her *Gaelic Symphony* was called such because of its use of these primarily Irish melodies, particularly in the second and third movements. Some of the themes were classic Gaelic melodies, which Beach utilized in their entirety because of their "simple, rugged, and unpretentious beauty," she would later explain.⁶⁴ Others were melodies composed by Beach to fit into the Gaelic style. The symphony reveals many of Beach's influences, obviously including Dvorak. The pentatonic themes, featuring the oboe and English horn in the slow movements, and combination of folk music with Romantic harmonies all echoed the ideas present in the *New World Symphony*.⁶⁵ Other influences include Brahms, who died just a year after Beach finished her symphony.⁶⁶

The *Gaelic Symphony* is representative of Amy's style in many ways. It is a "full-blown late Romantic work," as are most of Beach's compositions throughout her life.⁶⁷ The work is, as one musicologist describes it, "highly effective and carries passionate intensity."⁶⁸ This was also

⁶³ *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. "Dvorak, Antonin (Leopold)" (by Klaus Doge), <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/51222> (accessed January 19, 2015).

⁶⁴ Steven Haller, "Beach: Gaelic Symphony; Piano Concerto," *American Record Guide* 66, no. 5 (September, 2003): 73. *General OneFile*. EBSCOhost. <http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy2.otterbein.edu> (accessed February 16, 2015).

⁶⁵ Adrienne Fried Block, *Amy Beach: Passionate Victorian* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998), 89.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

a typical characteristic of her work, possibly a result of her passionate, intense personality and love for music that she carried throughout her life. Beach's passion for music was instant, and it often showed through her work. As she once said, "How inevitable it was that music should be my life's work. Both in composition and piano playing, there seemed to be such a strong attraction... that no other life than that of a musician could ever have been possible for me."⁶⁹ The *Gaelic* was Beach's first foray into the use of folk songs, but it would become a theme in much of her work after. The symphony also emphasizes modal degrees and mixed modes, a style common to Beach and much of the early Romantic composers.⁷⁰ Much of her style was like that of the Romantics, which was in large part due to the fact that her husband, who was much older than her, encouraged her to compose in this style.⁷¹ The frequent modulations in the work, along with an emphasis on thirds and increased chromaticism, are classic Amy Beach and typical of both Romantic and Anglo folk music.⁷² Eventually, Beach's later works experimented with more modern, even Impressionistic techniques, with unresolved dissonances and lean textures.⁷³ However, the *Gaelic Symphony* stands as an example of what Amy Beach was able to accomplish in the prime of her career and the stylistic choices she often made.

Ruth Crawford Seeger's String Quartet 1931 exemplifies the high point of her experimental, modern style and reveals the equally modern influences that permeated most of her

⁶⁹ Ibid, vii.

⁷⁰ *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. "Amy Marcy Beach" (by Adrienne Fried Block & E. Douglas Bomberger), <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/A2248268> (accessed December 15, 2014).

⁷¹ Jennifer Swinger Thomas, "Two American Composers of the Early 20th Century: Amy Cheney Beach and Ruth Crawford Seeger," *The Journal of American Culture* 5 (1982): 29.

⁷² *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. "Amy Marcy Beach" (by Adrienne Fried Block & E. Douglas Bomberger), <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/A2248268> (accessed December 15, 2014).

⁷³ Ibid.

works before her marriage. Crawford Seeger was in the midst of a creative high point in her life during the time when she began work on her String Quartet. She had moved to New York and was taking composition lessons with Charles Seeger, with whom she was developing a modern theory of dissonances and counterpoint. She started work on the quartet while in Europe on the Guggenheim fellowship, inspired by the various modern composers she was able to meet on her trip; these included Bartok, Berg, and Hindemith. Ruth finished composing String Quartet 1931 on her return from Europe. A pivotal, important piece in the history of modernist American music, the quartet garnered much attention from the time of its premiere until many decades later. It was the culmination of all of Ruth's years of study and formation of ideas, from serialism to dissonant counterpoint to mysticism. String Quartet 1931 also showed evidence of the two main influences on Ruth's music, particularly during her time in New York and the compositions she created there. The quartet makes heavy use of dissonances with little regard for "correct" preparation or treatment of them, a characteristic that was drawn straight from Charles Seeger's writings on dissonant counterpoint.⁷⁴ The other main influence on her work, including the String Quartet, was the Russian composer Scriabin. Scriabin was a highly modern composer who was known for his use of dissonance and atonality, an important element found in Crawford Seeger's String Quartet.⁷⁵

String Quartet 1931 represents and displays the many different elements of Ruth Crawford Seeger's highly experimental style of composition. From the beginning of her compositional career until her marriage to Charles Seeger, Ruth had always been considered an

⁷⁴ David Lewis, "Ruth Crawford Seeger Biography," Peggy Seeger, <http://www.peggyseeger.com/ruth-crawford-seeger/ruth-crawford-seeger-biography> (accessed January 19, 2015).

⁷⁵ *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. "Skryabin, Aleksandr Nikolayevich" (by Jonathan Powell), <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/25946> (accessed January 5, 2015).

“ultra-modern, avant-garde,” composer;⁷⁶ the quartet confirmed her status as such and continued to push the envelope of the acceptable in such a traditional form. While her style was always experimental, it did change over the course of the 1920s and 1930s. Her early works were highly dissonant and utilized “post-tonal harmonies a la Scriabin.”⁷⁷ Her later works continued to focus on dissonances, but also began to utilize serialism, counterpoint, etc. and have more of Ruth’s own style and ideas. String Quart 1931 represents the perfect mixture of both of these styles into a dissonant, serialized work in a traditional form. The piece utilizes extensive use of serialism integrated into every part of the piece, including rhythms, dynamics and even rests.⁷⁸ Particularly the third movement is most experimental and best displays the talents and genius of Ruth’s personal style. It is what she called a “heterophony of dynamics,” which was created by a serialized, constant growing and diminishing of dynamics and a thick texture.⁷⁹ Other common techniques used by Ruth were melodic cells, irregular phrasing and irregular meter.⁸⁰ Examples of these can be found throughout the Quartet, in which typical phrasing is not as important the phrasing formed by dynamic changes. Ruth was so committed to her and Charles’ ideas about dissonance that she frequently created lines that “sounded apart” to create diaphony instead of symphony.⁸¹ Other musical ideas and techniques in which Ruth Crawford Seeger frequently

⁷⁶ Judith Tick, “Ruth Crawford’s Spiritual Concept: The Sound-Ideals of an Early American Modernist, 1924-1930,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 44, no. 2 (Summer, 1991): 221. *Jstor*. Otterbein University Libraries. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/831604>.

⁷⁷ *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. “Ruth Crawford (Seeger)” (by Judith Tick), <http://www.grovemusic.com/> (accessed January 5, 2015).

⁷⁸ Kendra Leonard, “The Innovations of Ruth Crawford Seeger,” *The Avid Listener*, <http://www.theavidlistener.com/2014/12/the-innovations-of-ruth-crawford-seeger.html> (accessed December 29, 2014).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Karin Pendle, *Women in Music: A History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 320.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

drew from were her ideas about theosophy and the “spiritual concept,” as she called it.⁸² She gathered much of these ideas about spirituality and mysticism from her primary influence, Scriabin. She believed that the greater truth came from “feeling” an idea rather than thinking, and defined dissonance as a “spiritual symbol.”⁸³ In all of her compositions, including *String Quartet 1931*, Ruth Crawford Seeger proved herself as a composer by understanding “tradition through a modernist perspective, finding affinities that inked the very old with the very new.”⁸⁴

An interesting comparison can be drawn from the musical styles and characteristics of the most famous works of Beach and Crawford Seeger. Their styles were very different, much like their lives. Beach’s style was Romantic through and through; nothing was too progressive or bold. Crawford Seeger’s style was almost the opposite; her work was so bold and experimental that she frequently used innovative and new techniques in her pieces. However, both women wrote in the style that they were exposed to. Amy Beach wrote traditional Romantic works because it was the music of her husband’s generation, and he was the one who encouraged her to compose seriously through much of her life. She was simply not exposed to the more modern, dissonant and impressionistic style until after her husband’s death, and her compositions reflect this. Ruth Crawford Seeger’s compositions also reflect her musical surroundings. Her compositions are experimental and daring because she had the opportunity to study at a conservatory with the most current, contemporary young composers of the day, and the influence of Scriabin is a direct example of such. Both women began their musical careers writing in the traditional “feminine” genres, typically piano preludes, character pieces, chamber music and art

⁸² Judith Tick, “Ruth Crawford’s Spiritual Concept: The Sound-Ideals of an Early American Modernist, 1924-1930,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 44, no. 2 (Summer, 1991): 222. *Jstor*. Otterbein University Libraries. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/831604>.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 232.

⁸⁴ Karin Pendle, *Women in Music: A History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 319.

songs. However, both were able to transition to larger works successfully, evidenced by Beach's symphony and Crawford Seeger's string quartet. Finally, both women combined the old with the new in their compositions, a feat prompted most likely by their status as women. Ruth combined the traditional genre and form of the quartet with the ultra-modern technique of dissonant counterpoint. Amy's *Gaelic Symphony* was one of the first of the classic genre to incorporate folk songs throughout all movements. An analysis of the musical similarities between the two begin to reveal some of the reasons these women were able to be "recognized as successful American composers who transcended the barrier of sex."⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Jennifer Swinger Thomas, "Two American Composers of the Early 20th Century: Amy Cheney Beach and Ruth Crawford Seeger," *The Journal of American Culture* 5 (1982): 27.

Reasons for Success

Success in the field of composition has never been easy to achieve. Even for the greatest composers in history, aside from a few prodigies, composition was rarely a full time endeavor and some did not even see great success until after their death. However, Amy Beach and Ruth Crawford Seeger were able to overcome great challenges and barriers to not only become successful composers, but teachers, historians and educators as well. This begs the question as to how they were able to be successful when so many others weren't; how did they overcome and gain acceptance among their peers during a time in which the odds and public opinion were against them? In order to fully understand the impact and importance of their success, it is important to evaluate the role and opinion of women in music during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In 1904, music historian and critic Louise Elson posed the question, "Will there ever be a female Beethoven or a Mozart? Can a woman become a great composer?"⁸⁶ Today, it seems insulting that anyone even consider or pose the question, especially not a scholar in an academic article. However, it was not such an outrageous question in the minds of the majority at the beginning of the twentieth century. Historically, women's roles in music had been quite limited. Women have actively made music for many centuries, but they had always had severe limits.⁸⁷ These limits began early in European musical history, when the church was the main source of new music as well as performances of music. The Catholic Church set up many of the barriers for women in music that lasted for centuries, even prohibiting them from participating in church

⁸⁶ Richard Crawford, *America's Musical Life: A History* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2001), 365.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

choirs.⁸⁸ For centuries, the only women who had access to any sort of musical training were nuns, daughters of aristocrats, and the daughters of musicians.⁸⁹ Even then, they were discouraged from playing certain “unsuitable” instruments and composing. Eventually, it was considered suitable for wealthy young women to study piano or voice, and they were “long acknowledged as great interpreters of music.”⁹⁰ In Europe, female composers who were able to make a successful career of it were few and far between, and it wasn’t until the women’s movement after the Civil War that women in America began emerging as professional performers and composers.⁹¹ Still they were expected to write and perform pleasing parlor songs and lullabies, pieces with little substance.⁹² Most music schools in American and Europe still did not accept women as students, especially composition students, until the twentieth century.⁹³

Ideas and philosophies on the lack of women composers especially have been a topic of interest for many over the years, and there have been many theories as to why more women haven’t become professional composers. As mentioned, throughout much of history, women were discouraged from pursuing a career in composition. Not only were they discouraged, many believed them to be simply incapable of the demands of the act of composing. As music historian Karin Pendle explains, “There was serious doubt that women could create art music of

⁸⁸ Jennifer Swinger Thomas, “Two American Composers of the Early 20th Century: Amy Cheney Beach and Ruth Crawford Seeger,” *The Journal of American Culture* 5 (1982): 27.

⁸⁹ Eugene Gates, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Composers? Psychological Theories, Past and Present,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 28, no. 2 (Summer, 1994): 32. *JStor*. Otterbein University Libraries. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3333265>.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 27.

⁹¹ Karin Pendle, *Women in Music: A History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 193.

⁹² Kendra Leonard, “The Innovations of Ruth Crawford Seeger,” *The Avid Listener*, <http://www.theavidlistener.com/2014/12/the-innovations-of-ruth-crawford-seeger.html> (accessed December 29, 2014).

⁹³ *Ibid*.

real value even under the most favorable conditions.”⁹⁴ The earliest explanations for the lack of women composers reveal the sexist views of the times. In 1894, Havelock Ellis argued that “genius was less often manifested in females than in males,” which accounts for women’s lack of success at creating any lasting works of art or music.⁹⁵ Gates calls this idea the “mediocrity of women hypothesis,” which was the idea that men were both more intelligent and more stupid than women (an idea that continues to persist in some ways to today).⁹⁶ In his brazenly titled “Why Women Cannot Compose Music,” George Trumbull Ladd echoes Ellis’ earlier ideas, explaining that women simply do not have the creative imagination that males possess innately that is needed to compose.⁹⁷ These ideas are offensive and obviously hold no merit or truth, but serve as an important reminder of the overarching beliefs that women composers had to work to overcome. Despite differences in opinion as to why, there is no argument that there has been a lack of female composers in Western music history. However, rather than blaming a lack of intelligence or creativity, historians such as Gates have taken a more plausible stance on the subject: “The reason that so few women have attained eminence as composers lies not in the biology, but in the circumstances surrounding women’s lives- circumstances largely incompatible with the exacting needs of musical creation.”⁹⁸ It is not that women were less capable of composing, but simply that they did not have the luxury of the time and devotion

⁹⁴ Karin Pendle, *Women in Music: A History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 212.

⁹⁵ Eugene Gates, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Composers? Psychological Theories, Past and Present,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 28, no. 2 (Summer, 1994): 27. *JStor*. Otterbein University Libraries. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3333265>.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Jennifer Swinger Thomas, “Two American Composers of the Early 20th Century: Amy Cheney Beach and Ruth Crawford Seeger,” *The Journal of American Culture* 5 (1982): 27.

⁹⁸ Eugene Gates, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Composers? Psychological Theories, Past and Present,” *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 28, no. 2 (Summer, 1994): 31. *JStor*. Otterbein University Libraries. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3333265>.

necessary for composition. They were expected to take care of a family and a house, not spend time frivolously composing music and ignoring their responsibilities. They also did not have the financial independence to forge their own path to a composition career, and most husbands would not support their wives working as composers.⁹⁹ Gates also explains that this myth about women's inferiority has been fueled by the exclusion of them from music history texts. It is possible that the "conspiracy of silence on the part of music historians," may have led to our little knowledge and recognition of many important female musical figures.¹⁰⁰

Considering all of the barriers and obstacles against women in music, particularly composition, it becomes more significant and inspiring that these two women, Amy Beach and Ruth Crawford Seeger, were as successful as they were. While it can be argued that they succeeded where other women failed because of their enormous talent and abilities, I do not think this is a fair assumption to them or to the other aspiring women musicians whose names have been forgotten. In her essay, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" historian Linda Nochlin explains that art is rarely a production of innate genius; rather the environment of an artist or musician and the social elements play an impressive role in the development of the artist and of the work of art.¹⁰¹ It is easy to think that the best artists, composers and musicians will be successful no matter what, but it is simply not the case. Much of one's success is dependent on the surrounding circumstances of life, which were quite challenging for women throughout history. Nochlin also suggests that there are three elements that are important for

⁹⁹ Ibid, 32.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 27.

¹⁰¹ Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" in *Women, Art, and Power* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1988), 157-158.

success as an artist: total devotion, musical parents, and male confidants.¹⁰² Musicologist Carl E. Seashore believed that a wide range of factors were involved in success as a composer, including talent, intelligence, creativity, musical precocity, education, endurance and freedom.¹⁰³

Amy Beach and Ruth Crawford Seeger found success because of a combination of important factors and circumstances that worked together to push the boundaries of music composition. Amy Beach met all three of Nochlin's important elements for artists. Unlike many women who were married at such a young age, Beach never had children with her husband, nor did he expect her to spend her time keeping house. In fact, Dr. Beach made it possible that Amy's only responsibility was to study and compose in all of her free time, allowing for the total devotion to her art that most women throughout history did not have access to. Generally, only men who had the freedom and ability to support themselves were able to devote all of their time to their art. Also, while Amy did not come from a particularly musical family, her mother was an amateur singer and piano player who was able to recognize and nurture Amy's talent at a young age.¹⁰⁴ Also, the "Yankee will power" and legacy of success from her family's history was also an important aspect of Amy's own personality.¹⁰⁵ Her perseverance and work ethic were essential to her success, particularly when she was unable to receive training and had to teach herself. Finally, she had many male confidants and supporters, as mentioned earlier. Her husband was a huge supporter and influence on Amy's compositions in the first part of her life.

¹⁰² Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" in *Women, Art, and Power* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1988), 157-158.

¹⁰³ Eugene Gates, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Composers? Psychological Theories, Past and Present," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 28, no. 2 (Summer, 1994): 28. *JStor*. Otterbein University Libraries. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3333265>.

¹⁰⁴ Walter Jenkins, *The Remarkable Mrs. Beach, American Composer* (Warren, Michigan: Harmonie Park Press, 1994), 5.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 4.

He encouraged Beach to study and compose everyday, and his status in the community helped her status in the community as well, allowing for more opportunities than many other women. She was also a member of the Second New England School, which consisted of primarily male composers. These men, especially George Chadwick, spoke highly of her work and her abilities, giving her more credibility among the critics and professionals.¹⁰⁶ She had the talent, the imagination, and the creativity that Seashore thought to be essential, and the circumstances of her life and marriage filled in the rest.

In Ruth Crawford Seeger's case, she, too, was able to overcome obstacles and find circumstances that helped her career. She did not have the total devotion during her marriage that Amy Beach had and actually became a less productive composer after marrying Charles Seeger.¹⁰⁷ However, her success came chiefly from the fact that she was able to be independent and mostly self-reliant for many years in the beginning of her career, before she was married. She had the encouragement from a parent, her mother, who was not particularly musical but wanted more opportunities for her daughter than she had as a young girl. Ruth also had the education, studying for many years at the American Conservatory in Chicago. It was her independence, though, that made the difference. She taught lessons and music classes to make her own money, at times enough to support herself and her mother. During her twenties, she devoted all of her time to making, listening and composing music. Finally, she also had male confidants in her friends from Chicago, such as Henry Cowell, who often arranged performances

¹⁰⁶ Richard Crawford, *America's Musical Life: A History* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2001), 353.

¹⁰⁷ Kendra Leonard, "The Innovations of Ruth Crawford Seeger," *The Avid Listener*, <http://www.theavidlistener.com/2014/12/the-innovations-of-ruth-crawford-seeger.html> (accessed December 29, 2014).

of her music and opened doors that would have otherwise been closed.¹⁰⁸ Both women possessed unique characteristics and qualities that enabled them to persevere through difficulties. As Laurel Verissimo explains, it was necessary for women artists at the time to have “a good, strong, streak of rebellion.”¹⁰⁹ Evidence of this rebellion can be found in Amy Beach’s letter and answer to Dvorak’s call for nationalist music or in Ruth Crawford Seeger’s unabashedly experimental music (something definitely not seen as “suitable” for proper young women).¹¹⁰ They exhibited the qualities of single-mindedness, perseverance, and tenaciousness that were consistently attributed as “masculine;” now, these are just the elements of greatness.¹¹¹ The lives and works of these two accomplished women are inspirational and leave a legacy for those who follow.

¹⁰⁸ David Lewis, “Ruth Crawford Seeger Biography,” Peggy Seeger.com, <http://www.peggyseeger.com/ruth-crawford-seeger/ruth-crawford-seeger-biography> (accessed January 19, 2015).

¹⁰⁹ Laurel Keddie Verissimo, “Amy Beach: Her Life, Times and Music,” (Master’s diss., San Jose State University, 1993), 25.

¹¹⁰ Kendra Leonard, “The Innovations of Ruth Crawford Seeger,” The Avid Listener, <http://www.theavidlistener.com/2014/12/the-innovations-of-ruth-crawford-seeger.html> (accessed December 29, 2014).

¹¹¹ Laurel Keddie Verissimo, “Amy Beach: Her Life, Times and Music,” (Master’s diss., San Jose State University, 1993), 25.

Legacy and Conclusion

From their wide range of accomplishments in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is clear that Amy Beach and Ruth Crawford Seeger are two important figures in the musical history of the United States. Their countless works in all genres, which featured innovative techniques and styles, stand for themselves among the works of more commonly remembered composers such as Edward MacDowell and Charles Ives. The final aspect of their significance and place in the landscape of American composers lies in the legacy they left behind and the influences and contributions their work has made on music history and the composers that followed.

Amy Beach's legacy and musical career can be summed up in one word: pioneer. Beach found success in places and ways that no woman before her had ever done. Her long list of accomplishments, from piano prodigy performer to genius Romantic composer, helped to dispel any doubt that a woman could function at the "highest levels of musical endeavor."¹¹² Her status as pioneer began when she was just a young girl, when she performed a piano concerto with a professional orchestra at the age of only sixteen. This solidified her status as the first professional concert pianist trained in America, as well as part of the first generation of female instrumentalists in the country.¹¹³ Her career only grew in its' significance when she began composing. Amy Beach was the nation's first notable female composer.¹¹⁴ Prior to her, there had been few women in the United States who had had the means, opportunities or education to be able to compose full time and have their compositions taken seriously by music critics and

¹¹² Richard Crawford, *America's Musical Life: A History* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2001), 367.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 364.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 355.

musicians across the world. Even more impressive was the impact and legacy left by her two large-scale works, particularly the *Gaelic Symphony*. While it cannot be said for certain if she was the first American woman to ever attempt to compose a large-scale work, she was undoubtedly the first to succeed at composing large works for the concert hall.¹¹⁵ At its premiere by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the *Gaelic* became the first symphony by an American woman to be performed by a professional ensemble anywhere.¹¹⁶ The magnitude of this accomplishment cannot be overstated, as Beach became a sort of symbol of what women were capable in the field of music. As Steven Haller puts it, “But in the symphonic medium, the seminal figure is Amy Beach, who must surely be a role model for all who followed in what remains even today a largely male-dominated field.”¹¹⁷ Her legacy surely continues to inspire young female composers today, who continue to struggle for success even in the modern world. However, her influences on music today are not purely symbolic. She contributed musically in many ways as well. During her time as a concert pianist, she focused on bringing classical music to the American people. She frequently incorporated the music of the people, from outside the concert hall, into her works as thematic material.¹¹⁸ In fact, her *Gaelic Symphony* was the first symphony by an American to quote folk songs as themes, which would become a distinctively American style in the years to come.¹¹⁹ Her other works were just as innovative. In her piano works written at the MacDowell Colony, she used bird calls as a basis for the themes. This

¹¹⁵ *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. “Amy Marcy Beach” (by Adrienne Fried Block & E. Douglas Bomberger), <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/A2248268> (accessed December 15, 2014).

¹¹⁶ Karin Pendle, *Women in Music: A History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 220.

¹¹⁷ Steven Haller, “Beach: Gaelic Symphony; Piano Concerto,” *American Record Guide* 66, no. 5 (September, 2003): 73. *General OneFile*. EBSCOhost. <http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.ezproxy2.otterbein.edu>.

¹¹⁸ Richard Crawford, *America’s Musical Life: A History* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2001), 367.

¹¹⁹ Karin Pendle, *Women in Music: A History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 220.

would be a major contribution to the compositional styles of the twentieth century.¹²⁰ Beach's works and career were, as Pendle puts it, a "beacon to light the way for the coming generations of ...composers."¹²¹

Ruth Crawford Seeger's career built upon the foundation created by Amy Beach and continued to push the boundaries of what was possible for a woman or for any composer, male or female. She was never content to leave things as they were or to fit within the boundaries of what was expected of her as a woman. Before her marriage, Ruth's compositional style was considered "ultra-modern" or "avant-garde."¹²² This in itself was an accomplishment, as it was even more difficult for a woman to be successful in experimental music than it would have been if she had stuck with neo-classical, more refined pieces. She created her own kind of aesthetic and style, which she called the "spiritual concept," based heavily on the ideas of transcendental modernism and theosophy. Her compositions in this style included recreations of Eastern sacred chant, expressive terminology, and mystic chords.¹²³ These ideas were all influential to contemporary music later in the twentieth century, as well as her contemporaries in the ultra-modern circle. The musical innovations of her works had implications for composition for years to come. Her most famous work, *String Quartet* 1931, made use of serialism in ways that had not been done before. She integrated serialism throughout, including using serialized rhythms,

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid, 222.

¹²² *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, s.v. "Ruth Crawford (Seeger)" (by Judith Tick), <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/A2224168> (accessed January 5, 2015).

¹²³ Judith Tick, "Ruth Crawford's Spiritual Concept: The Sound-Ideals of an Early American Modernist, 1924-1930," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 44, no. 2 (Summer, 1991): 235. *Jstor*. Otterbein University Libraries. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/831604>.

rests and dynamics.¹²⁴ Her use of a “heterophony of dynamics,” throughout the third movement was totally unique and unprecedented, as was her use of dissonant counterpoint, the theory she developed with her husband.¹²⁵ Her other pieces continued to prove that Ruth was consistently ahead of her time in style and theory. Her *Three Songs* used techniques such as Sprechstimme, tone clusters, and an optional instrument ostinato; composers would not utilize these techniques widely until decades later.¹²⁶ Ruth Crawford Seeger’s legacy extended beyond her contributions to the field of contemporary composition. Her work in the later part of her life with American folk song helped to permanently preserve the nation’s musical heritage for all generations to come. She demonstrated that women, like men, could use their work to make a statement and promote change; her art song, “Chinese Laundryman” addressed the oppressive conditions and exploitation faced by Chinese immigrants in the 1930s.¹²⁷ Through this work, Ruth used her role of composer to also take on the role of activist. Finally, Ruth Crawford Seeger continued to be a pioneer and example for women musicians, winning the first ever Guggenheim Fellowship awarded to a woman in 1930.¹²⁸

The significance of the careers of Beach and Crawford Seeger can be summarized by a statement from an article on the two by Jennifer Swinger Thomas: “Amy Cheney Beach and Ruth Crawford Seeger were recognized as successful American composers who transcended the

¹²⁴ Kendra Leonard, “The Innovations of Ruth Crawford Seeger,” *The Avid Listener*, <http://www.theavidlistener.com/2014/12/the-innovations-of-ruth-crawford-seeger.html> (accessed December 29, 2014).

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Karin Pendle, *Women in Music: A History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 321.

¹²⁷ Charles Hiroshi Garrett, *Struggling to Define a Nation: American Music and the 20th Century* (Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2008), 149.

¹²⁸ Karin Pendle, *Women in Music: A History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 321.

barrier of sex.”¹²⁹ Their professional and personal lives were similar in a few key ways, including the support of their families and their male colleagues. However, the differences between the two, both professionally and musically, tell more about the changing social and musical world that was America in the early twentieth century than their similarities do. Crawford Seeger’s musical style points to a more modern aesthetic than Beach’s, mirroring the musical trajectory of the American and European composers that followed. The differences between the opportunities offered to Ruth versus Amy also speak to changing tides within the role of women in music. At the same time, it is clear that the view of women as composers was a slow, ongoing process of acceptance, which certainly did not start or end with either of these women.

One question still remains: What can the lives and works of these remarkable pioneers in composition teach today’s musicians, scholars, and human beings? To put it in simpler terms, what impact or relevance does this have for today? One answer is that these women created opportunities where there were none, and they continue to have an impact on the female composers of today because of their bold actions. Richard Crawford argued that in Amy Beach’s day, she “served...as a symbol of what a woman musician could do if given the chance.”¹³⁰ Her legacy and the legacy of Ruth Crawford Seeger still stand as examples of the level of achievement that women in the arts can reach. It is also important to continue to promote and practice inclusion of Beach, and the countless other women composers and artists throughout history in music history texts, research, and performances. The only way these women will

¹²⁹ Jennifer Swinger Thomas, “Two American Composers of the Early 20th Century: Amy Cheney Beach and Ruth Crawford Seeger,” *The Journal of American Culture* 5, no. 4 (Winter, 1982): 27.

¹³⁰ Richard Crawford, *America’s Musical Life: A History* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2001), 367.

continue to be remembered and begin to be celebrated as equals is if they receive the recognition they deserve from all musicians and historians around the world.

Finally, their lives serve as a reminder and call to action for the current generation. It is essential that today's young women are encouraged to compose, perform, or participate in music in any way they so choose, without the barriers or stigma that women throughout the centuries faced and, in some cases, continue to face. Who can say what other strides and accomplishments Beach and Crawford Seeger could have made if they had not faced such intense opposition, "for at the same time that the process of recognition started in earnest, so did questions about unfulfilled promise and silence."¹³¹ Encouragement of women in the field of composition, inclusion of women in music history and their inspirational examples are just a few important ways that Ruth Crawford Seeger and Amy Beach continue to impact the music and feminist worlds today. Because, as composer Marion Bauer explained, "There are a great many more than you think. What many women composers need is encouragement and an opportunity to work and to be taken seriously...Just think of us as composers and never call us lady composers."¹³²

¹³¹ Judith Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer's Search for American Music* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), vii.

¹³² Melissa De Graaf, " 'Never Call Us Lady Composers': Gendered Receptions in the New York Composers' Forum, 1935-1940," *American Music* 26, no. 3 (Fall, 2008): 277. *JStor*. Otterbein University Libraries. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40071709>.

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