

program notes

BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

The Bamboula, Rhapsodic Dance, Op. 75 (1910)

SAMUEL COLERIDGE-TAYLOR ■ 1875-1912

Though Samuel Coleridge-Taylor was English by birth, training and residence, he was unquestionably a hero to American audiences. Born in London in 1875 to a white English woman and a physician from Sierra Leone, Samuel was brought up in suburban Croydon by his mother after his father returned to Africa to practice medicine. As a boy, Coleridge-Taylor studied violin with a local teacher, sang in a church choir, and showed talent as a composer, and in 1890, he was admitted to the Royal College of Music. By the time he graduated in 1897, he had produced a significant collection of works, including a symphony and several large chamber compositions, a number of which were performed publicly. His music became known to Edward Elgar, who offered the young musician advice and encouragement. Coleridge-Taylor's greatest success came in 1898 with the premiere of the cantata *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast*, the first of several works inspired by the poetry of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. He held a number of conducting and teaching positions thereafter in London, including appointments as professor of composition at the Trinity College of Music and Guildhall School of Music. Coleridge-Taylor composed steadily throughout his life, and became one of the most respected musicians of his generation on both sides of the Atlantic

— New York orchestral players described him as the “Black Mahler” on his visit to that city in 1910. His premature death from pneumonia at the age of 37 in 1912 was partly a result of overwork.

The Bamboula was a traditional African drum made from the bottom half of a barrel with skin stretched over one end, open on the other, and played with the hands. The name also came to be applied to a dance accompanied by the drum, and both came to the West Indies with the slave trade in the mid-18th century. The *Bamboula* migrated on to America, where it was among the dances at the Black gatherings held every Sunday in Congo Square in New Orleans (now part of Louis Armstrong Park, north of Rampart Street).

In 1905, Coleridge-Taylor included a *Bamboula* based on a song from the West Indies among the *24 Negro Melodies* for piano, which incorporated traditional Afro-American tunes. When he was commissioned five years later to compose a new orchestral piece for his appearance in June at the Litchfield Festival in Norfolk, Connecticut, he based it on the melodic seed from his earlier piano piece, and expanded into a ten-minute “Rhapsodic Dance.” He conducted the premiere of *The Bamboula* on June 10th, and its excellent reception — along with what he called the “most remarkable” playing of the orchestra, which included many members of the New York Philharmonic — made it “the best performance of my music I ever heard.” He declared the day “the happiest of my life.”

Scottish Fantasy for Violin and Orchestra and Harp, Op. 46 (1879-1880)

MAX BRUCH ■ 1838-1920

Bruch, like many Romantic composers, was interested throughout his life in folk song. In 1863, he published twelve Scottish folk airs in four-part settings, and incorporated German, British and Hebrew traditional music into his works. (His *Kol Nidrei* for Cello and Orchestra was based on an ancient chant of the Hebrew ritual.) When Bruch was conductor of the Liverpool Philharmonic from 1878 to 1880, he gathered first-hand knowledge of Great Britain's indigenous music, and was inspired by the music, lore and land of Scotland to produce the *Fantasy with Free Use of Scottish Airs* for Violin and Orchestra.

Abraham Veinus wrote of it, "Bruch operates freely with a set of Scottish folk melodies, which are distinguished by a wholesome simplicity and beauty. Grafted on to this is the kind of elaborate virtuoso technique that usually brings the house down." The opening movement is divided almost equally between a solemn introduction and an elegant setting of the tune *Auld Rob Morris*. The prominence of the harp, with its bardic and folk associations, prompted Wilhelm Altmann, a friend of Bruch, to comment that this opening movement represents "an old bard who contemplates a ruined castle and laments the glorious times of old." The vigorous second movement, subtitled *Dance*, is based on the song *Hey, the Dusty Miller*. The next movement is a richly bedecked version of the touching Scottish love ballad *I'm a-down for lack o' Johnnie*. The finale uses the traditional war song *Scots wha hae*, which, according to legend, was sounded

by Robert the Bruce at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314.

Symphony in E minor, Op. 32, "Gaelic" (1896)

AMY (MRS. H.H.A.) BEACH ■ 1867-1944

Amy Beach was the most prominent female American composer of her day, one of the leading keyboard artists during the years around World War I, the first native woman composer to earn recognition abroad, the first well-known female musician to receive her entire professional training in this country, the first to write a symphony. Born Amy Cheney in Henniker, New Hampshire in 1867 to a family of colonial descent, she received her earliest instruction on piano from her mother, began composing melodies at four, and gave her debut recital a year later, at which she played some waltzes of her own invention. In 1875, when she was eight, the family moved to Boston, where Amy pursued her studies of piano and theory. On October 23, 1883, she made her public debut with orchestra in Boston, and pursued a successful career as a soloist for the following two years. In December 1885, Amy Cheney married the prominent Boston surgeon Henry Harris Aubrey Beach, and thereafter referred to herself in the Victorian fashion as "Mrs. H.H.A. Beach" (initials only). Her *Gaelic Symphony*, premiered by the Boston Symphony in 1896, was the first such work by an American woman. Following the death of her husband in 1910, Amy Beach resumed an active concert career. She died from a heart attack in 1944 at age 77.

On December 16, 1893, Beach attended the premiere of Antonín Dvořák's "New World" Symphony at New York's Carnegie Hall and was inspired by it to base

what was to be her only symphony on songs from her ancestral British heritage — Irish tunes of what she called “simple, rugged and unpretentious beauty.” Beach composed the rest of the work’s thematic material “in the same idiom and spirit.” The Symphony in E minor, subtitled “Gaelic,” was premiered by the Boston Symphony conducted by Emil Paur on October 30, 1896, making it a first for an American woman composer, as was the publication of the work two years later.

The “Gaelic” Symphony is traditional in its four-movement structure, modest in its scoring, and Brahmsian in its style and thematic development. Most of the thematic material, as well as the prevailing stormy mood of the sonata-form first movement, was derived from Beach’s 1890 song *Dark Is the Night*, Op. 11, No. 1, on a poem by William Ernest Henley: *The sea is full of wandering foam, The sky of driving cloud; My restless thoughts among them roam ... The night is dark and loud.* The main theme is a restless version of the melody, the second subject more lyrical and quieter. For formal and thematic contrast, an Irish jig tune is introduced in the development and brought back in the recapitulation. The three-part second movement (A–B–A) takes a pastoral melody for its outer sections and an Irish reel for its central episode. Beach wrote that the *Lento* is meant to evoke “the laments of a primitive people, their romance and their dreams.” It is based on two traditional Irish songs that are threaded through the movement. The finale, which Beach said represents the Celts in “their sturdy daily life, their passions and battles,” is a large sonata form whose two themes are derived from the song that served as the basis of the opening movement.

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ALLENTOWN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

MARCH 9-10, 2024

8:00 P.M., SYMPHONY HALL

P R O G R A M

DIANE M. WITTRY MUSIC DIRECTOR/CONDUCTOR

The Bamboula, Rhapsodic Dance, SAMUEL COLERIDGE-TAYLOR
Op. 75

Scottish Fantasy for Violin with Orchestra MAX BRUCH
and Harp, Op. 46

Prelude: Grave — Adagio cantabile

Scherzo: Allegro —

Andante sostenuto

Finale: Allegro guerriero

TIMOTHY CHOOI, Violin

I N T E R M I S S I O N

Symphony in E minor, Op. 32, "Gaelic" AMY BEACH

Allegro con fuoco

Alla Siciliana — Allegro vivace — Tempo I — Allegro vivace

Lento con molto espressione

Allegro de molto