

The Transcriber's Art - #38

Richard Yates

Secrets and Minuet, by Amy Beach

Study how best to develop all the possibilities of a small form. A small gem may be just as brilliantly cut as one weighing many carats —Amy Beach, “Music’s Ten Commandments as Given for Young Composers”

Earlier articles in this series promoted the search for transcription material in keyboard works composed as teaching tools or specifically for children. That strategy has again proven its value although I have changed the lesson a bit to fit the guitar.

Amy Beach

The stories told of Amy Beach’s early years show that she deserves equal standing with such musical prodigies as Mozart and Chopin. At just one year of age she could sing 40 melodies from memory and with perfect pitch. She composed piano pieces at age four, and—strikingly reminiscent of a Mozart legend—could accurately remember four-part vocal music after one hearing. At age seven she began public piano recitals of Handel, Beethoven and Chopin, as well as her own pieces. Although she was discouraged from public performance and from studying composition by her parents and later by her husband, she eventually excelled at both and enjoyed a long career of piano concerts and acclaimed compositions. Most of her music was published under the name “Mrs. H.H.A. Beach”, but following her husband’s death in 1910 she changed it to “Amy Beach”. However, she found that her reputation was so strongly tied to “Mrs. H.H.A. Beach” that she resumed it several years later for her published music.

The catalog of her music is substantial and varied: music for keyboard, chamber ensembles, orchestra, secular and sacred chorus, and songs. She was at ease with the largest groups as shown in her *Mass in E Flat*, *Op. 5* and the ‘*Gaelic*’ *Symphony*, *Op. 3*, but it is her skill with small keyboard forms that guitarists can best appreciate. *Children’s Carnival*, *Op. 25* and *Children’s Album*, *Op. 36* (written the same year as the *Symphony*) both are sources of material well-suited to the guitar. The history of music shows that only the best composers have this ability to combine instruction and beauty in small forms.

***Secrets*, Op. 25, No. 5**

The scope of her musical activities precluded an extensive teaching career, but Beach was always supportive of musical clubs and music education. She composed several dozen pieces for children that are deftly scaled for smaller hands and that incorporate specific technical lessons. The piano score of *Secrets* is marked *la melodia molto tenuto* meaning “hold the melody notes for their full duration.” It might not be immediately obvious to readers which notes these are, but examination of the original gives some clues about her intent (see Figure 1).



Figure 1

The entire piece uses this texture except for the couple of measures of scale melody. The first of each pair of beamed eighth notes has a quarter note stem showing that it is to be held ('*tenuto*') through the end of the following eighth note when they are then both released. The left and right hands alternate in this fashion. The quarter-stemmed notes do not by themselves form a melody, so the teaching purpose of the piece seems to be to train the basic keyboard motion of holding down a note while then playing another one with a finger of the same hand. Although the mechanics of doing this on the piano are unlike those of the guitar, there certainly are technical issues related to note duration that are necessary for guitarists to master. While our errors are often in the opposite direction—allowing notes to ring over too long ('*tropo tenuto*'?)—we also must learn how to maintain them just as Beach is trying to teach. Transcribers can collude in these errors or help correct them through the fingerings that they choose.

The over-ringing of notes in arpeggio textures is an idiomatic feature of guitar music that can be supported through fingering choices and I have attempted to do this throughout the transcription of *Secrets*. The standard that I tried to meet was to have every arpeggio note fingered so that it could be held past the start of the next note. This accounts for the occasionally arcane fingerings that you see in the score and the plethora of fingering numbers ('*tropo notazione*'!). There are places where this standard simply could not be maintained, but still I may have pushed the limits beyond what is reasonable or feasible for some players. For those readers who find my little exercise excessive or frustrating, and who are getting a little dizzy from all of the white-out they are slathering on the score, I have posted a file of *Secrets* entirely without fingering on my website at www.yatesguitar.com/secrets.pdf.

Minuet, Op. 36, No. 1

The *Minuet* is the first of five pieces in *Children's Album, Op. 36* all of which are suitable for guitar transcription. It combines grace, elegance and delicate harmonic sense within a small form. The piano score is contained on two treble staves and a range of barely two octaves. Transposed from F major to G major in the guitar transcription, it sits entirely on the first five strings and required no unusual modifications. Because the sixth string is not used, it could fit comfortably into a recital program before a piece that uses drop D tuning—just tune the sixth string down before the *Minuet* and it will have settled into that pitch well before you need it.

If you have alternate strategies for transcribing these pieces, please get in touch through:

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Minuet

Transcribed for guitar
by Richard Yates

Op. 36, No. 1

Amy Beach
(1867–1944)

8 *p*

4 1 2 4

④

5 *V*

-2 -3 3 2

9 *V*

13 *mf* *p*

18 *cresc.*

23 *mf*

27

Detailed description: This is a musical score for guitar, titled "Minuet" (Op. 36, No. 1) by Amy Beach, transcribed by Richard Yates. The score is written for a single guitar voice in treble clef, with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. The piece begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The first line (measures 1-4) features a series of chords and moving lines, with a circled 4 indicating a fourth finger. The second line (measures 5-8) includes a trill (measures 5-6) and a dynamic marking of *mf*. The third line (measures 9-12) continues the melodic and harmonic development. The fourth line (measures 13-17) features a dynamic marking of *p*. The fifth line (measures 18-22) includes a *cresc.* (crescendo) marking. The sixth line (measures 23-26) features a dynamic marking of *mf*. The seventh line (measures 27-30) concludes the piece with a final chord and a fermata. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, trills, and dynamic markings.

32 *f* *rit.* *p* *a tempo*

37 V

41 V III

46 *cresc.* *f* Fine ④ *p*

50

54 V4 *cresc.*

58 ② *dolce*

62 ③ 1 2 D.C. *pp*

Secrets

Op. 25, No. 5

Transcribed for guitar
by Richard Yates

Amy Beach
(1867–1944)

Andantino

la melodia molto tenuto

p

4

7

10

13

dim.

16 II_3
pp *dolce*

19 II_3
cresc.

22 III_2
f *poco rit.*

25 II_2 VII
pp *a tempo*

28
la seconda volta molto rit.

31
pp *pp*