

SOLO REPERTOIRE



**Beach Piano Music**  
**Martina Frezzotti** *pf*  
*Piano Classics PCL10277*

While Amy Beach was active as a concert pianist and composer for the instrument throughout her career, her solo piano music accounts for only 33 titles among her roughly 175 compositions. Songs and choral pieces far outnumber her works for piano. After the death of her husband in 1910, Beach successfully toured Europe playing primarily her own music and returned to the US only at the outbreak of the First World War. When she died in 1944 at the age of 77 she was celebrated as the foremost woman composer the United States had produced. Yet today, over a century and a half since her birth, the place of Beach's music in the repertoires of most pianists cannot compare with that of, say, Gottschalk, MacDowell, Griffes or Ives, her compatriots also born in the 19th century.

The Italian Martina Frezzotti intends to make this neglected composer better known. A pupil of Lazar Berman at the Imola International Piano Academy and of Eliso Virsaladze at the Moscow Conservatory, Frezzotti teaches at the Tartini Conservatory in Trieste. This representative selection of the piano works of Amy Beach follows her debut album for Piano Classics devoted to Fanny Mendelssohn.

Two of Beach's most substantial and challenging works are given pride of place: the *Variations on Balkan Themes* from 1904 and the *Prelude and Fugue*, Op 81, of 1914. The *Variations* is a substantial work that postdates two of Beach's important orchestral works, the E minor Symphony and the Piano Concerto. No fewer than four themes are treated, a Serbian song and three other Balkan folk songs, obtained from a missionary to the region, in a series of eight variations unfolding over 25 minutes. Frezzotti's vivid characterisations of each variation – a barcarolle, a Hungarian csárdás, a slow waltz,

a funeral march, etc – seem effortless. Her refined technique renders Beach's thickest textures with perfect clarity. The virtuosity required in the *Prelude and Fugue* calls to mind Liszt's *Fantasy and Fugue on the Theme B-A-C-H*, which may have been a model. Frezzotti's free and fanciful treatment of the *Prelude* is very appealing. Her performance of the *Fugue*, in this case with a theme comprising the musical letters in Beach's name, A-B-E-A-C-H, is deeply emotional and beautifully laid out and paced.

It may be the miniatures that make the strongest case for inclusion on contemporary recitals. What could be more charming than *Dreaming* (1892), with its gently undulating movement and delicate sentiments? In works from the 1920s and '30s, supported by an increasingly dissonant harmonic palette, a thoroughly apt hyper-realism emerges. *Canoeing* (Op 119 No 3), for instance, seems the perfect musical equivalent of the sport, while *Honeysuckle* (Op 97 No 5) conveys both the delicate blossoms and the bees tending them. In these and other evocative gems, Frezzotti strikes just the right stylistic balance in succinctly wrought miniatures. Her impeccable technique in service of a burgeoning imagination is admirable. And surely gratitude must follow for Frezzotti's sympathetic exploration and realisation of Beach's compellingly idiomatic musical voice, which, however long neglected, still boasts immense competence and expressive individuality.

PATRICK RUCKER



**Beethoven Piano Sonatas, Vol 3 – No 17, Op 31 No 2; No 20, Op 49 No 2; No 27, Op 90; No 31, Op 110**  
**Daniel Heide** *pf*  
*AVI-Music AVI8553540*

Daniel Heide, born in 1976, studied primarily at the Franz Liszt Hochschule für Musik in his native Weimar. For much of his career he has been a collaborative performer and he has made more than a dozen recordings