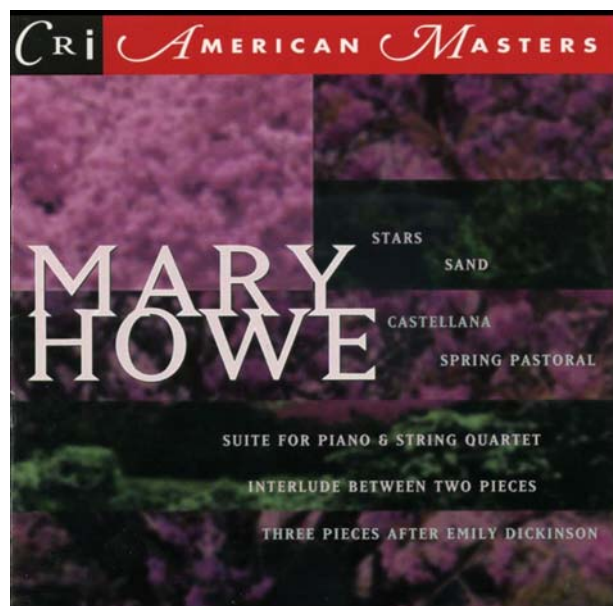


Mary Howe (1882 – 1964)



1. <i>Stars</i> (1927)	(4:06)
2. <i>Sand</i> (1928)	(2:14)
3. <i>Castellana</i> (1930, 1934)	(12:50)
Celius Dougherty, piano; Vincenz Ruzicka, piano; The Vienna Orchestra; William Strickland, conductor	
Suite for String Quartet and Piano (1928)	(19:18)
4. I – Romanza	(7:34)
5. II – Scherzo	(5:05)

6. III – Finale	(6:38)
Members of The Chamber Arts Society of the Catholic University of America: Werner Lywen, violin; George Steiner, violin; Norman Lamb, viola; John Martin, cello; Emerson Meyers, piano	

Interlude Between Two Pieces for

Flute and Piano (1942)	(9:39)
7. <i>Traits</i>	(3:50)
8. <i>Interlude</i>	(2:58)
9. <i>Tactics</i>	(2:51)
Members of The Chamber Arts Society of the Catholic University of America: Wallace Mann, flute; Emerson Meyers, piano	

Three Pieces after Emily Dickinson for

String Quartet (1941)	(14:38)
10. <i>The Summers of Hesperides</i> (Andante con moto)	(5:53)
11. <i>Birds, by the Snow</i> (Tranquillo)	(3:30)
12. <i>God for a Frontier</i> (Allegretto)	(5:15)
Members of The Chamber Arts Society of the Catholic University of America: Werner Lywen, violin; George Steiner, violin; Norman Lamb, viola; John Martin, cello	
13. <i>Spring Pastoral</i> (1936)	(4:49)
The Imperial Philharmonic of Tokyo; William Strickland, conductor	

Total Playing Time: 70:01

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Notes

The music of **Mary Howe** first became known to me in 1984 when I was searching for a short cello piece to be included in a concert program by the Aviva Players, a chamber music group that features the works of women composers. My search at the American Music Collection at the New York Public Library of the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center was rewarded when I found *Ballade fantasque* by Mary Howe. It was listed in the bibliography *Women in American Music*, a seminal work by Block and Neuls-Bates on the role of women in American life from colonial times to the present. The *Ballade* proved to be highly original in its melodic lyricism, jazzy rhythms, and the virtuosity of the writing. Frequently performed, it has always been well received.

Some time later I attended a lecture by the prominent musicologist, Nancy Reich, who had just published a book on Clara Schumann (1819–1896), the celebrated pianist and wife of Robert Schumann. Reich illuminated the life of Clara Schumann, the composer—a tale of an extraordinarily gifted woman who began composing at the age of ten, but whose confidence dwindled after she assumed the responsibilities of wife, mother, concert pianist, and promoter of the works of her husband, the composer Robert Schumann. Clara Schumann wrote: “I once believed that I had creative talent, but I have given up this idea: a woman must not wish to com-

pose—there never was one able to do it.” (How sadly misinformed she was!)

With her biography of Clara Schumann, Reich made me aware of the gaps in music history, particularly in the area of woman composers. I devoted the next several years to examining the life and works of Mary Howe (1882–1964), a composer who faced many of the same hurdles that Clara Schumann had faced almost one hundred years earlier. Mother, wife, concert pianist, Mary Howe was more fortunate than Clara Schumann because many women had in the interim emerged as serious composers and Howe’s musical world included some of them. The most prominent American woman composer to date was Amy (Mrs. H. H. A.) Beach, who in association with Howe and a group of other women composers, organized The Society of American Women Composers in 1925. However, it was not until she was forty years of age that Howe determined to make composition a major element in her professional life.

Born in Richmond, Virginia, on April 4, 1882, Mary Howe’s passion for music grew more powerful as she matured. Her early musical and piano training was under the private tutelage of Herminie Seron. In 1904 she studied piano for a short intensive period in Dresden, Germany with Richard Burmeister, a former pupil of Liszt. She returned to the U. S.

to give recitals in and around Washington, D.C., which had become her home. In 1912 she married Walter Bruce Howe and they began to raise a family of three children. During this period she entered the Peabody Conservatory of Music to study piano with Ernest Hutcheson and Harold Randolph. There she met Anne Hull, an accomplished colleague, and together they formed a duo-pianist team that toured in recital from 1920–1935.

At Peabody, Howe studied composition with Gustave Strube, a former violinist with the Gewandhaus and Boston Symphony orchestras, and who in 1916 became the first conductor of the Baltimore Symphony. Howe earned her diploma in composition in 1922. Although she had already composed a number of mature works, she wrote "...it was not until 1924 that I really started composing. I can only say it was because gates had been opened and I wanted to go into those fields and pastures...that had always seemed the property of other people...I used to love piano playing, and wrestling with the difficulties, and the great effort to interpret. But when I began to compose I felt I had the right to be there doing it because what I worked on was myself." A short period of coaching with Nadia Boulanger in Paris in 1933 marked the end of Howe's formal training in composition.

Howe set down strong roots in the Washington, D.C. community and was actively involved in its musical affairs. Her foremost interest was the National Symphony Orchestra which she founded in collaboration with her husband, Walter Bruce Howe, and a group of like-minded civic leaders. From its first season in 1931 through 1948, she served on the board of directors of the National Symphony Orchestra Association, and organized the Women's Committee of the Association, serving as its chairperson for many years. The list of her associations with other civic enterprises includes the Friends of Music in the Library of Congress (initially called the Chamber Music Society of Washington), the Society of American Women Composers as already noted, the National Federation of Music Clubs, the Friday Morning Music Club, as well as the MacDowell Colony and Bennington College.

From 1924 up until the years before her death in 1964, Howe amassed a diverse catalogue which was formally compiled in 1994 by her son Calderon Howe and which forms the basis of these notes. It consists of more than two hundred works, comprising pieces for orchestra, various smaller instrumental ensembles, choral works, works for one and two pianos and many art songs for solo voice. Howe described her style of composition as "spanning and bridging"—reaching from the past through the contemporary to develop her own language, essentially tonal but frequently dissonant when needed, inventive, lyrical and rich in texture. She always wrote with conviction, imagination, and variety of expression and produced works that ranged dynamically from quiet simplicity to the most complex.

The present CD features a generous sampling of Howe's orchestral and chamber music writing. The most important recordings are of the orchestral works because they also are historical documents of Howe's long association with the American conductor William Strickland (1914–1991). Howe's collaborative relationship with Strickland developed when he came to Washington, D.C. in 1942 to be stationed at the Army Music School at Fort Meyer where he organized and directed the Army Music School Choir. During this period, Strickland commissioned a piece from Howe, *Prophecy (1792)* (1943), a setting for chorus and orchestra of excerpts from William Blake's "A Song of Liberty."

At the conclusion of World War II, Strickland left Washington for Nashville, Tennessee, where he founded the Nashville Symphony Orchestra in 1946 and was its conductor until 1951. He returned to the northeast to assume direction of

the Oratorio Society of New York and to engage in musical activities in Washington. He reported that "Mary was very interested in me and what I was doing, and helped me a great deal. She was keen, perspicacious and sharp sighted." In 1951–1953, Strickland was awarded a Fulbright scholarship, and in 1955 a Ditson Fellowship of Columbia University. Under the aegis of the State Department, he went abroad to promote American music. He conducted a number of major orchestras in Europe and the Far East, including the Tokyo and Manila Philharmonic orchestras, as well as orchestras in Poland and Iceland. In 1955, he performed her *Stars, Sand* and *Castellana* with the Vienna Philharmonic. During this period, Strickland also made a number of recordings of American orchestral repertoire for CRI.

Stars was composed in 1927 for orchestra and has been widely performed and recorded. It has been played by the National Symphony Orchestra under Hans Kindler, the Philadelphia Orchestra under Leopold Stokowski, and by Quinto Maganini's Little Symphony and more recently by the San Francisco Symphony in 1995.

Howe describes *Stars* as "...a miniature tone-poem inspired by the gradually overwhelming effect of the dome of a starry night—its peace, beauty, and space. The sonorous ensemble of the strings opens the work with the suggestion of the spreading immensity of the starry vault. As the music progresses, one's imagination is carried into the contemplation of the awesome depths of space and the sense of mystery to which man compares his insignificance with infinity."

Sand, composed in 1928, has been equally widely performed, often as a companion piece to *Stars*. Howe describes *Sand* as an "imaginative piece on the substance itself— its consistency, grains, bulk, grittiness, and its potential scattering quality; more or less what it appears to be when sifting through your fingers on the shore."

Leopold Stokowski wrote to Howe, "I enjoyed so much conducting your short but masterful work. I have had much pleasure in rehearsing it and it has developed in me a new conception of *staccato*, which perhaps you will notice when you hear it. But of course this is only one of the many interesting elements in the work."

It was Strickland who asked Howe to compose another piece that along with *Stars* and *Sand* would make a more substantial group. The result was *Rock*, composed in 1954 for large orchestra, that portrayed the substance, rock, in her words as "impregnable, amenable, usable, sentinel, lonely, steadfast, withstanding, magnificent and undeniable." The three pieces together examine the meaning, the aura, and the imaginative exploration of these substances.

Castellana: Romanesca on Spanish Themes for two pianos was composed in 1930 and was premiered the same year at the Friday Morning Music Club in Washington by Howe and her collaborator, Anne Hull. In 1934, Howe reworked the piece for two pianos and orchestra and this version was first performed in 1935 by Ethel Barlett and Rae Robertson with the National Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Hans Kindler. A brilliant performance in 1955 by **Celius Dougherty** and **Vincenz Ruzicka**, duo-pianists with **The Vienna Orchestra** under William Strickland, was received with great enthusiasm by Viennese critics and audiences, and was the occasion for the first recording of the piece by CRI.

In an article by Kindler in the *Washington Post*, 1939, Mary Howe is quoted describing *Castellana* as a piece:

"built on four authentic Spanish folk tunes which I have never seen in any collection but which I heard sung by some delightful Spanish cousins of my father. The piece begins with some free material of my own as an

introduction, leading into the first folk tune, the words of a verse which will indicate its gay village quality: 'From the market place to the green cross she goes—and doesn't care at all.' The chorus 'Come and see me, early rose; come and see me tomorrow, etc.' This and its development make my first section after the introduction, and lead into the romantic love song which is the slow movement of the piece and has an honest poem on sentiment: 'Love grows as shadow—distance only makes it greater. Today a hope is born, tomorrow dies and so one goes, forgetting what one cares for. But I tell you, one who has loved cannot forget.'

There follows a section built on my recollection of two bars of Spanish accompaniment leading with some force and brilliance into the two-piano cadenza of free question and answer, which brings us into the scherzo of the piece, the song of the guava vendor with a lively and persistent rhythm and rapidly enunciated line. Here the words outstripped me as they were always sung fast and with precise accent, winding up with 'please inform me if you like them! See, here comes the guayabera.'

So, without delay, into the final fourth section, a catchy, not usual type of tune capable of amusing manipulations, and which the words were naughty enough to be kept from me, although my father sang them with glee. There follows a coda which combines bits of all four tunes and winds up with an uncomplicated cluster of skyrockets to finish."

In 1928, Howe composed a Suite for String Quartet and Piano which is in three parts: Romanza, Scherzo, and Finale. It was the beginning of a fecund period for Howe in which she wrote many art songs, chamber music works, and orchestral pieces of distinction. The Suite is a richly melodic piece with original themes that are freely developed. The three movements, each having their individual color and spirit and contrasting vividly with each other, are woven together with genuine craftsmanship into a unified whole, in which the various instruments are balanced with great dexterity.

Interlude Between Two Pieces was written in 1942 for Howe's son, Calderon. Originally intended for alto recorder

and harpsichord, the piece is in three sections, "Traits," "Interlude," and "Tactics." It was first performed on December 31 1942 at one of the Howe family's traditional New Year's Eve musicales by Calderon Howe, alto recorder, and Ralph Kirkpatrick, harpsichordist. In the composer's words, "'Traits' has two themes, one almost like a blues melody played over a filigree accompaniment, the other a spiritual over the same support. 'Interlude' is a simple interlude which leaves you up in the air just the way an interlude ought to. 'Tactics' is a forthright piece with two themes sparring for position which come out quite well adjusted to each other." Performances of this work have since been given by Wallace Mann, flute, and Emerson Meyers, piano, and most recently by Melanie Bradford and Mara Waldman, on the same instrumental combination.

Three Pieces After Emily Dickinson for string quartet was composed in 1941 and comprises three separate movements, each coupled with the last line from one of Emily Dickinson's poems: Andante con moto ("The summers of Hesperides"), Tranquillo ("Birds, by the snow"), and Allegretto ("God for a frontier"). The individual movements are not settings of the poems, as Howe explained: "For some reason unknown to me, the last line in each poem called upon in my mind not a musical theme but the sort of music I wanted to write." The work is richly imaginative and modern in feeling with the use of dissonance.

Spring Pastoral is a setting of a published poem by Elinor Wylie. This piece was originally composed in 1936 as a chorus for three part women's voices with piano accompaniment and was published in 1938 by G. Schirmer. It has been variously described as "a wistful tone poem, adroitly scored with a keen sense of instrumental color which embodies the timelessness and the bittersweet poignancy of a drowsy reverie over a memory of long ago;" "...a delicate and sensitive, yet intensely felt composition full of the mood its title invokes;" "...a soaring ecstatic melody, the 'ur' stamp of the authentic composer." This short piece arranged for strings, flutes, oboes, bassoons, and horns sings with Howe's lyric power contained in a gossamer veil of sound.

—Dorothy Indenbaum

Production Notes

Digitally remastered by Joseph R. Dalton and Robert Wolff, engineer at Sony Music Studios, NYC.

From CRI SD 103:

Stars and *Sand* originally released in 1956

From CRI SD 124:

Stars, *Sand* and *Castellana* originally released in 1958

From CRI SD 145:

Spring Pastoral originally released in 1961

From WCFM, LP-9:

Suite, Interlude, *Three Pieces After Emily Dickinson*: Recorded July 21–22, 1951, Textile Museum, Washington D.C. through the courtesy of George Hewitt Myers. Warren E. McDowell, recording engineer. The WCFM recordings were mastered by Allen Wonneberger. Rights transferred to CRI courtesy of the Howe family.

CRI *American Masters*

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