

# Marie Antoinette Desmond Seward: The Forgotten American Composer

Marie Antoinette Desmond Seward was a pioneering American composer who wrote over 100 songs, piano pieces, and other works. She was active in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and her music was popular in both the United States and Europe. However, she is now largely forgotten, and her work is rarely performed. This article aims to shed light on Seward's life and career, and to highlight the importance of her contributions to American music.



## Marie Antoinette by Desmond Seward

★★★★☆ 4.6 out of 5

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Enhanced typesetting	: Enabled
Word Wise	: Enabled
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## Early life and education

Marie Antoinette Desmond was born on December 23, 1846, in East Orange, New Jersey. She was the daughter of Thomas Desmond, an Irish immigrant who worked as a stonemason, and Mary Murphy Desmond, an Irish-American. Seward showed an early aptitude for music, and began taking piano lessons at the age of five. She also sang in the choir at her

local church. In 1863, Seward enrolled at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston. She studied piano with William Mason and harmony with John Knowles Paine. Seward graduated from the Conservatory in 1867, and returned to New York City to begin her career as a composer.

## **Career**

Seward's early compositions were mostly songs and piano pieces. Her songs were often based on poems by American and European poets, such as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, and Heinrich Heine. Her piano pieces were often inspired by the music of Chopin and Schumann. Seward's music was quickly noticed by critics and audiences alike, and she soon became one of the most popular composers in the United States. In 1873, Seward's song "The Lost Chord" was published, and it quickly became one of her most famous works. The song was praised for its beautiful melody and its touching lyrics, and it was soon being performed by choirs and soloists all over the world. Seward also wrote a number of choral works, including the cantata "The Pilgrims" (1876) and the oratorio "The Resurrection" (1880). Her opera, "The Legend of Don Juan" (1884), was the first opera by an American woman to be performed by a major opera company.

In addition to her composing career, Seward was also a successful pianist and teacher. She toured extensively throughout the United States and Europe, and she was a regular performer at the White House. Seward also taught piano and composition at the New England Conservatory of Music and the National Conservatory of Music in New York City. She was a mentor to many young composers, including Amy Beach and Ethelbert Nevin.

## **Later life and death**

Seward continued to compose and perform throughout her life. In her later years, she focused on writing choral music and songs for children. Seward died on July 20, 1920, at the age of 73. She is buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx, New York City.

## **Legacy**

Marie Antoinette Desmond Seward was one of the most important American composers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Her music was popular in both the United States and Europe, and she was a successful pianist, teacher, and mentor. However, Seward is now largely forgotten, and her work is rarely performed. This is due in part to the fact that she was a woman composer, and women composers have historically been marginalized in the music world. However, Seward's music is now being rediscovered by scholars and performers, and it is beginning to be recognized for its beauty and originality.

Seward's music is characterized by its beautiful melodies, its rich harmonies, and its expressive rhythms. She was a master of counterpoint, and her music is often complex and sophisticated. However, Seward's music is also accessible to listeners of all levels, and it has a timeless appeal. Seward's music deserves to be heard by a wider audience, and it is hoped that this article will help to shed light on her life and career.

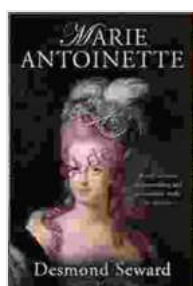
## **Selected works**

- "The Lost Chord" (song, 1873)
- "The Pilgrims" (cantata, 1876)
- "The Resurrection" (oratorio, 1880)

- "The Legend of Don Juan" (opera, 1884)
- "Ave Maria" (for soprano and organ, 1890)
- "Piano Sonata in E minor" (1895)
- "String Quartet in D minor" (1900)
- "Children's Suite" (for piano, 1905)

## Further reading

- Block, Adrienne Fried. *Marie Antoinette Desmond Seward: A Bio-Bibliography*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2007.
- Cohen, Aaron I. *International Encyclopedia of Women Composers*. New York: Books & Music (USA), 1987.
- Seward, Marie Antoinette Desmond. *The Lost Chord and Other Songs*. New York: G. Schirmer, 1891.



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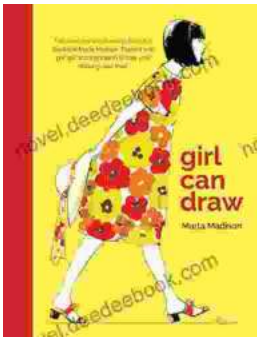
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