

Minnesota Musicians of the Cultured Generation

Eugene Clifford Murdock

Pianist and Composer

Robert Tallant Laudon
Professor Emeritus of Musicology
University of Minnesota

924 - 18th Ave. SE
Minneapolis, Minnesota
(612) 331-2710
laudo001@tc.umn.edu

No adequate picture of Murdock has been found. There is a very small newspaper photo published in the *Saint Paul Pioneer Press* in the Second Section for Sunday, 30 April 1905 in a large and important article on the St. Paul Choral Club This page carries portraits of the principal musicians of the city.

Eugene Clifford Murdock

Composer and Pianist

Eugene Clifford Murdock, pianist/composer and teacher, was born in Charlestown, Massachusetts, 12 December 1862, the son of Caleb Murdock and Maria Emerson Murdock. He was trained in Massachusetts but no exact location or institution has been established.¹

He married a teacher, Elizabeth Howland Hutchinson, in New Bedford, Massachusetts, 17 October 1889.² They arrived in St. Paul as newly-weds. No information is available as to why they chose St. Paul—the support that he gave to musical institutions possibly argues for some type of wealth on his part. According to city directories, Eugene C. Murdock is listed as a music teacher in St. Paul as early as 1890 and appears there through 1920 though not in 1921.

From his early years in Minnesota, he composed music. Four years after his arrival, he published through W. J Dyer & Brothers of St. Paul a bilingual “Wedding Serenade” or “Hochzeitsständchen” dedicated to the Musik-Verein St. Paul. The German tradition of the male chorus, the Männerchor, was still active in St. Paul. Local affairs plus regional concerts, contests and festivals were held regularly. Murdock’s Serenade was set for men’s chorus and baritone solo.³ The title page carried a vignette of a Germanic horn player, the horn being the magical instrument of the German forest..

Murdock, active in civic music in St. Paul, found many occasions for his help. As the primary organizer of the Professional League of Musicians, a social organization, he extended the invitation to musicians to form a Minnesota State Music Teachers Association in 1901. This group, successful beyond his wildest dreams, became the MSMTA, later MMTA, and is active today after 100 years of existence. The Professional League on the other hand seems to have had a short life, It is listed in the directories from 1898 through 1902.

When the St. Paul Symphony Orchestra was organized in 1905, Murdock served that group as subscriber, guarantor, member of the board of directors, and treasurer.⁴ It was difficult for each of the Twin Cities to support its own orchestra. By 1915, the St. Paul group gave way to a St. Paul Philharmonic Orchestra which gave popular concerts under Josef Sainton.

Murdock also served in 1905 on the board of directors of the St. Paul Choral Club, another one of the musical-civic accomplishments about which Murdock felt strongly. The Choral Club was part of a circuit which included clubs of Minneapolis, Milwaukee, Chicago and Cincinnati. The St. Paul Club had to

work especially hard because it was the only one without a financial guarantee.⁵ There was a close connection between the Club and the Symphony since the Club programmed large-scale works that required orchestra accompaniment.

Murdock was elected President of MMTA for 1904 and served 1 January to 1 October. He addressed the third annual meeting at Duluth and referred to the expanse of Lake Superior which could be an inspiration for music similar to that of MacDowell's *Sea Pictures*. He held out hopes that the association might eventually be able to fund performances of large-scale works by Minnesota composers although in that particular year they had to be content with a program of smaller compositions.

He admitted that the association had still to successfully attack its educational mission even though its fraternal and artistic ones had been fulfilled. Toward this end, he scheduled an informal session for the exchange of ideas. Once again, MMTA faced the problem of how to spread its influence throughout the state. They had appointed 47 vice-presidents, covering half the counties of the state, had acquired the addresses of some 3000 musicians who had been approached by letter. The membership now stood at 127, not enough, but with good possibility of growth. The trepidation MMTA felt in scheduling a convention in Duluth rather than in the Twin Cities was allayed by fine work of the Duluth committee and a large associate membership to attend the concerts of the convention.⁶ MMTA voted at this convention to continue its loose affiliation with the national organization, the National Music Teachers Association (NMTA) and Nellie A. Hope, the leader of the Women's Orchestra of St. Paul was elected as delegate to the NMTA convention at St. Louis.

Murdock had advanced ideas on teaching. He believed in the progressive ideal: teaching music as language is learned. One started with sounds (especially rhythms) and then gradually added the notation, technique, etc., all of those "non-essentials" to actual sounding music. Music for him encompassed both head and heart but the initial appeal had to be to the heart, to the actual sound.⁷ Over the years, he acquired a notable library. He or his family donated a collection of piano and orchestral scores from his library to the St. Paul Public Library.⁸

During his years in St. Paul, Murdoch composed a series of songs none of which were published. They include settings of poems by substantial poets: Sara Teasdale, Christina Rossetti and William Henley. Nearly all are art-songs, that is settings which attempt an interpretation of the text by expressive melody and descriptive accompaniment. They are effective but perhaps a little restricted in harmony.

He did not present these publicly much before 2 January 1917 when he and Christine Miller, the noted contralto, gave an invitation concert for his friends at the Elk's Club in St. Paul. The songs proved a wonderful present for the guests who had little suspicion of the number and quality of the compositions which he had been quietly accumulating during the years. Miss Miller was a strong supporter of American composers and included Murdock's songs on her national programs. As a consequence, other artists began to sing them.

In April of 1918, Hazel Fleener presented a group of these songs in a program in St. Paul.⁹ When Galli-Curci presented a concert 8 January 1919, she included Murdock's "My True Love Lies Asleep." Evidently she or others took this to other locales. It is the only song by a Minnesotan that is listed in William Trent Upton's *Art-Song in America*. Unfortunately, Christine Miller, the first champion of Muardock's songs, followed the dictates of the age and when she married (becoming Mrs. Clemson), gave up professional work except for rare occasions when she could further the cause of music.¹⁰

Murdock retired to New Bedford, Massachusetts¹¹ and died of diabetes at the Anna Jaques Hospital, Newburyport, Massachusetts, 13 September 1924.¹²

List of Works

MnSP = St. Paul Public Library
C = Copyright Office

Vocal Ensemble

Ms. or Print	Title	Dedication & Date Publisher	For	Location
Pr	Wedding Serenade (Hochzeitsständchen) English and German Words by Chas. A. Fisher	Dedicated to the "Musik- Verein St. Paul" c. 1894 W. J. Dyer & Bro. Mpls. and St. Paul	Men's voices (Quartette or Chorus) and Baritone Solo	MnSP

Songs

Ms	April Text by William Watson	Song, 1918	voice & piano	C
Ms	Betrayed Text by Lizette Woodworth Reese	Song, 1918	voice & piano	C
Ms	Brooks, The Text by William Rice Dunroy	Song, 1917	voice & piano	C

Ms	Christmas Song Text by Eugene C. Murdock (1908)	Song, 1917	voice & piano	C
Ms	Daybreak Text by Sir Wiliam Davenant	Song, 1917 dedicated to Miss Christine Miller	voice & piano	C
Ms	Full Sea Rolls and Thunders, The Text by William E. Henley	dedicated to Miss Christine Miller, Song 1917	voice & piano	C
Ms	Half-ring Moon, The Text by John B. Jabb	Song, 1918	voice & piano	C
Ms	I Gave my Heart to a Woman Text by William E. Henley	Song, 1918	voice & piano	C
Ms	Invictus Text by William E. Henley	Song, 1917	voice & piano	C
Ms	Invocation Text by Wendell Phillips Stafford	Song, 1917	voice & piano	C
Ms	Lullaby Text by Christina Rossetti	Song, 1917 dedicated to Miss Christine Miller	voice & piano	C
Ms	My True Love Lies Asleep Text by Lizette Woodworth Reese	Song, 1918	voice & piano	C
Ms	O Have you Blessed Behind the Stars Text by William E. Henley	Song, 1918	voice & piano	C
Ms	Sands Are Alive with Sunshine, The Text by William E. Henley	Song, 1918	voice & piano	C
Ms	Sea Gypsy, The Text by Richard Hovey	Song, 1918	voice & piano	C
Ms	To You Text by Eugene C. Murdock (1908)	Song, 1917	voice & piano	C
Ms	Trip and Go Text by Alfred Austin Noyes	Mayday Dance Song, 1921	voice & piano	C
Ms	Twilight Text by Sara Teasdale	Song, 1919	voice & piano	C
Ms	Water Lily, The Text by John B. Jabb	Song, 1917	voice & piano	C

Dates are primarily dates of copyright. Only rarely do we find a date of composition.

-
- 1 The records of the New England School of Music (founded 1867, Boston) are reasonably complete whereas the records of the Boston Conservatory (founded 1867) are no longer available.
 - 2 Marriage Register of New Bedford for 1889, Entry 369. Elizabeth was the daughter of Sylvander Hutchinson (born Braintree, Vermont, 14 July 1815) and Elizabeth Horton. The father was a school teacher who moved to New Bedford in 1864 to sell books and stationery.
 - 3 A copy is preserved in the St. Paul Public Library Reference Department.
 - 4 See the Louise Chapman Collection of Programs in Special Collections of the University of Minnesota Libraries where he is listed on the board for the second through the fourth season, 1907-1910 as well as in other capacities. Programs of this group can be found in several collections.
 - 5 See the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* for 30 April 1905 which contains pictures of many of the musical leaders of the city such as Titcomb, Fairclough, Nellie Hope and Elsie Shawe.
 - 6 *Proceedings of the Third Annual Meeting of the MSMTA*, pp. 6-9.
 - 7 Murdock, "Are we Teaching Music?" *Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the MSMTA*, pp. 28-33.
 - 8 See the 1944 Report of the Music Librarian.
 - 9 At the St. Paul Little Theatre of the Gargoyle, 18 March 1918.
 - 10 She did appear at the Eleventh Biennial of the National Federation of Music Clubs at Peterborough, New Hampshire, 2 July 1919, where she sang songs by H. T. Burleigh and Walter Kramer but none by Murdock.
 - 11 His name appears in the city directories there for 1921, 1922, and 1923. His death was only briefly mentioned in New Bedford.
 - 12 Death Certificate, Newburyport, Massachusetts.