

Thompson, Verne Waldo (1899–1965)

DAN SHULTZ

Dan Shultz, emeritus professor of music, Walla Walla University, has researched and written extensively about Seventh-day Adventist music history and musicians. His publications include *A Great Tradition*—a history of music at Walla Walla University, and the *Adventist Musicians Biographical Resource*—an encyclopedia with biographies of over 1100 Adventist musicians. He founded the International Adventist Musicians Association, serving as its president for ten years and editing its publications and website for over thirty years. Shultz and his wife, Carolyn (nee Stevens), live in College Place, Washington.

Verne Thompson, pianist and musicologist, taught at two Seventh-day Adventist schools and at the Eastman School of Music.

He was born in Dinuba, California, on April 26, 1899, the older of two sons of Harrison (Harry) G. and Birdie Ellen (Ella) Pardee Thompson. Both sons were given opportunity for music study, Verne in piano

and his brother, Julian, in cornet. They attended Pacific Union College, where Verne graduated with a B.S. in music in 1923 and married Willa Norine Culp that same year.¹

Thompson taught music at Hawaiian Mission Academy, a Seventh-day Adventist school in Honolulu, from 1923 to 1928. He taught at and served as director of the Punahou Music School in Hawaii from 1929 until the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. He subsequently accompanied soprano Marian Anderson and tenor Lauritz Melchior, noted artists of that time, when they visited the islands to perform for the U.S. Armed Forces.²

In 1943 Thompson accepted a position teaching piano at Emmanuel Missionary College (EMC), now Andrews University, in Berrien Springs, Michigan. Two years later he completed an M.Mus. at the American Conservatory in Chicago, where he had previously (1929) earned a B.Mus. During his time at EMC he and his brother, who was serving as chair of the physics department, frequently performed together on campus to enthusiastic listeners.³

In 1947 Thompson left EMC to pursue a Ph.D. at Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, completing the degree in 1955. He remained at Eastman as a member of the faculty and became associate dean of



Verne Waldo Thompson.

From 1945 *Cardinal*, Emmanuel Missionary College yearbook.

Graduate Studies. His dissertation, *Studies in Music Literature: Selected Composers of the 18th and 19th Centuries . . . A Synopsis in Topical Form*, was published by the Department of Music Literature, Eastman School of Music, in 1963, and, after his death, by Wm. C. Brown Co. in 1968.

Thompson was regarded as “a pillar of the church” by fellow believers in Rochester. The renowned musicologist often played the piano for Sabbath school and worship services, even volunteering “to play a rickety old piano for the children.” He died from a heart ailment on November 20, 1964, at age 65. At the memorial service held in his Adventist church, so many of the Eastman faculty attended that there was standing room only⁴

SOURCES

1944 *Cardinal*. Emmanuel Missionary College yearbook.

“Dr. Verne Waldo Thompson . . .” *Utica Observer-Dispatch*, November 22, 1964.

“Former Punahou Music Director Dies on Mainland.” *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, December 2, 1964.

“Verne Waldo Thompson.” *FamilySearch*. Accessed October 12, 2022.

<https://www.familysearch.org/tree/person/details/G43P-TJM>.

Walsh, H. E. “Dr. Verne Thompson obituary.” *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, April 19, 1965.

NOTES

1. “Verne Waldo Thompson,” *FamilySearch*, accessed October 12, 2022, <https://www.familysearch.org/tree/person/details/G43P-TJM>.
2. 1944 *Cardinal*, Emmanuel Missionary College yearbook, 23; “Dr. Verne Waldo Thompson . . .,” *Utica Observer-Dispatch*, November 22, 1964, 40; “Former Punahou Music Director Dies on Mainland,” *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, December 2, 1964. 30.
3. 1944 *Cardinal*, Emmanuel Missionary College yearbook, 23.
4. H. E. Walsh, “Dr. Verne Thompson obituary,” *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, April 19, 1965, 7; “Dr. Verne Waldo Thompson . . .”

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