



Professor Miller in his studio at Southern Missionary College.

Photo courtesy of Elva B. Gardner and J. Mabel Wood, *Southern Missionary College: A School of His Planning* (1972).

Miller, Harold Amadeus (1891–1966)

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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.

Harold A. Miller was a nationally noted gospel song writer in the first half of the 20th century with over 200 published songs and choruses to his credit. During 37 years as an Adventist educator he taught at an academy and four colleges, spending most of his career at Southern Missionary College (now Southern Adventist University).

Early Years

Harold Gottlieb Miller was born in Tonawanda, New York, on November 14, 1891, to Fred R. Miller and Mary Elizebeth Nugent Miller. He was the second-oldest of their five children and one of four sons. Both parents were members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.¹

Fred Miller, a trained musician and pianist, was Harold's first music teacher and he found his son to be an apt student. When he traveled to Europe to play for and briefly study with the celebrated pianist Theodor Leschetizky,² Miller entrusted 16-year-old Harold with teaching his advanced students.³

During Harold's high school years his parents moved the family to Syracuse, New York, where their children would have the opportunity—lacking in Tonawanda—of associating with other Adventist young people. Some of the friends Harold made in Syracuse were attending South Lancaster Academy (later Atlantic Union College) in Massachusetts, and he enrolled there himself in 1911. After learning in one of his music classes that the famous composer Mozart had changed his middle name from Gottlieb (German for "God-loved") to Amadeus, the Latin equivalent, Harold did likewise, having always disliked his given middle name. Following a week of prayer near the close of that school year, he was baptized by the academy's principal, C.S. Longacre, and became a member of the Syracuse church.⁴

Harold completed a B.Mus. at Otterbein College and later an M.Mus. at Eastman School of Music.⁵ He started teaching as head of the music department at Mount Vernon Academy in Ohio in 1916, where he met Grace Virginia Purdham, an English and Latin teacher. They married on May 24, 1917,⁶ and would have a son, Harold Amadeus, Jr. six years later, on August 12, 1923.⁷ While his son was still an infant his father wrote the words and melody for "Slumber Song," dedicated "To my little boy, Harold Amadeus, Jr." and published in the *Youth's Instructor* in June 1924.⁸

Professor and Gospel Composer

In 1929 Miller joined the faculty of Washington Missionary College (now Washington Adventist University) in Takoma Park, Maryland, where he taught for the next five years.⁹ By this time he was known as a talented composer whose output included the melodies for a growing number of gospel songs. While at WMC he received notice in 1932 that several of his songs had been published in a Hall-Mack hymn collection.¹⁰

Following the acquisition of Hall-Mack by Homer Rodeheaver's publishing company in 1936,¹¹ several of Miller's songs were published in their gospel songbooks. Ten were included in *The Church Hymnal*, published by the Adventist church in 1941 and seven in *Gospel Melodies and Evangelistic Hymns*, issued by the church in 1944.¹² He also published *Songs Along the Way* in 1951, a collection of eighteen choruses he had written.¹³ Only one of his hymns, "Like Jesus," No. 492, was included in the 1985 *Seventh-Day Adventist Hymnal*.¹⁴

Miller was a frequent contributor of articles in denominational periodicals on the important role of music in culture and education and as a spiritual force, and on the value of making good choices in all aspects of life on

the personal level.¹⁵ He also wrote poems that, along with his articles and actual copies of some of his music, were published in several periodicals, including the *Review and Herald*, *Ministry*, the *Youth's Instructor*, the *Journal of True Education*, and newspapers at schools where he taught.¹⁶

A New Era in Music at Southern Junior College

Miller's arrival at Southern Junior College (now Southern Adventist University) in 1935 as a formally trained musician and published composer signaled the beginning of a new era in music on that campus, the real start of the music program that has flourished into the 21st century. An inspiring teacher and choral conductor, Miller immediately expanded touring activities and introduced the choir to more challenging works. Soon after his arrival he arranged for the choir to participate in annual performances of the *Messiah* with the civic chorus and orchestra in nearby Chattanooga, a tradition that continued for many years.¹⁷

The widespread use of piano in worship in the period between the decline of the old reed pump organs and the introduction of electronic organs, which happened during Miller's lifetime, led to his 1939 article, "Piano Pointers for Church Musicians," in *Ministry* magazine. In a detailed and lengthy essay, he cautioned about overcompensating for the limitations of the piano when compared to the organ by playing too loudly, and adding flourishes, syncopation, and sweeping arpeggios.¹⁸

SMC Legend

In 1942 Miller left Southern Junior College (SJC), only to return in 1945, after chairing the music departments at Union and Pacific Union Colleges.¹⁹ It is likely that contact with the programs at these schools affected Miller's perspective about what should happen in music as SJC became a four-year senior college, a step taken by the end of his first year back on campus. The school, now named Southern Missionary College (SMC), would offer a B.A. degree in music beginning in 1946, and a degree in music education in the 1950s.²⁰

By the time of his return Miller had become a legendary figure on campus because of his success as a published composer and writer and the inclusion of his music in the 1941 Seventh-day Adventist *Church Hymnal*. He had also written a school song in his second year at SJC, "Come on Down to Collegedale," which had been a hit on campus and was sung with unbridled enthusiasm by the students.²¹

Moreover, Miller had become an important part of life at the school. Students from his early years at the college recall with fondness his Friday evening song services, which he would lead while seated at the piano, and his illuminating comments about classical works he played at the beginning of chapels.²²

When SMC gained accreditation as a four-year senior college in 1950, plans were made for a music building that was completed in 1954, the year after Miller's retirement. An attractive brick building in Georgian-Colonial style, it had seven studios, seventeen practice rooms, a rehearsal room, and a recital hall, and was a source of pride

for the school. Dedicated in 1954, it was named the Harold A. Miller Hall.²³ Items placed in its cornerstone included a song, "Someday He'll Come Again," with words and music by Miller.²⁴

He and his wife, Grace, were living in Orlando, Florida, when he died on December 6, 1966, at age 75.²⁵

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NOTES

1. Fred Miller, United States Census, 1900, *FamilySearch*, accessed May 10, 2022, <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MSXG-SJZ>; Wayne Hooper and Edward E. White, *Companion to the Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1988), 479. Although it is mentioned in the biography by Hooper and White that his parents left the church at one point, Harold Amadeus Miller, Jr. in an email to me, December 27, 2012, stated, "I have no memory of my grandparents, Fred R. Miller and Mary Nugent Miller ever leaving the SDA church or beliefs."
2. Nicolas Slonimsky, *Baker's Biographical Dictionary*, 8th ed. (New York: Schirmer Books, 1992), 1042-1043; Carl Laubach, "College of Music Will Give Fall Program Saturday Night," *Sligonian*, November 7, 1929, 1; Hooper and White, 479; Clara Nosworthy Wright, "Teacher-Musician-Composer," *Youth's Instructor*, July 31, 1956, 15.
3. Wright, "Teacher-Musician-Composer," 15-16.
4. Ibid, 15; "South Lancaster Academy," *Atlantic Union Gleaner*, May 22, 1912, 1.
5. A photograph caption in *Southern Tidings*, November 3, 1948, 5, lists both degrees, as do Southern Adventist University records, confirmed to the author by the Academic Dean's office, September 12, 2018; no dates listed.
6. Wright, "Teacher-Musician-Composer," 15; "Ohio, County Marriages, 1789-2016," accessed May 11, 2022, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:XZS2-253>).
7. "Ohio, County Births, 1841-2003," *FamilySearch*, accessed May 11, 2022, <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:Q236-5821>.
8. Harold Amadeus Miller, "Slumber Song," *Youth's Instructor*, June 24, 1924, 5.
9. Laubach, "College of Music Will Give Fall Program."
10. "Music Head's Songs Published in Hymnal," *Sligonian*, March 17, 1932, 2. This publisher was acquired by the Homer Rodeheaver Company in 1936. Several of Miller's songs were subsequently published by Rodeheaver.
11. Talmage W. Dean, *Twentieth Century Protestant Church Music in America*, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1988), 130-131. Rodeheaver was later purchased by Word, Incorporated, in Waco, Texas.
12. *Gospel Melodies and Evangelistic Hymns*, (Takoma Park: Review and Herald, 1944); *Ministry*, August 1944, 43.
13. "Music in Worship and Evangelism," *Ministry*, April 1951, 39.
14. Hooper and White, 479.

15. For example, three articles in the *Journal of True Education*: "Cultural Values of Music and Art," December 1940, 13; "The Cultural Value of Music," February 1942, 15; "Music as a Spiritual Force," February 1946, 15.
16. These writings started in the 1930s and continued into the 1960s.
17. Harold Miller's influence at Southern is detailed in Elva B. Gardner and J. Mabel Wood, *Southern Missionary College: A School of His Planning* (Collegedale, TN: Southern Missionary College, 1975), 179, 184; and Dennis Pettibone, *A Century of Challenge: The Story of Southern College, 1892-1992* (Collegedale, TN: College Press, 1992), 127-128.
18. H.A. Miller, "Piano Pointers for Church Musicians," *Ministry*, August 1939, 23-26.
19. "Union College News Items," *Northern Union Outlook*, October 6, 1942, 2; "New Teachers Joining Staff," *Pacific Union Recorder*, June 28, 1944, 2; "Music Week," *Pacific Union Recorder*, May 16, 1945, 8.
20. Gardner and Wood, *A School of His Planning*, 179.
21. "Come On Down to Collegedale," *Southern Tidings*, July 6, 1938, 8.
22. Pettibone, *A Century of Challenge*, 127-128.
23. Gardner and Wood, *A School of His Planning*, 180.
24. J.D. Bledsoe, "Cornerstone Laying at Southern Missionary College," *ARH*, January 1, 1953, 20.
25. "Harold Amadeus Miller obituary," *Southern Tidings*, January 20, 1967, 17.

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