

**EDWARD MACDOWELL, A  
GREAT AMERICAN TONE  
POET; HIS LIFE AND  
MUSIC. [LONDON-1922]**

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EDWARD MACDOWELL

*I do like the works of the American composer MacDowell! What a musician! He is sincere and personal—what a poet—what exquisite harmonies!*

*Jules Massenet.*

*I consider MacDowell the ideally endowed composer.*

*Edvard Greig.*



*Edward M. Howell.*

# EDWARD MACDOWELL

A GREAT AMERICAN TONE POET  
HIS LIFE AND MUSIC

BY

JOHN F. PORTE

Author of

*Sir Edward Elgar, Sir Charles V. Stanford, etc.*

WITH A PORTRAIT OF EDWARD MACDOWELL  
AND MUSICAL ILLUSTRATIONS IN THE TEXT

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## FROM MACDOWELL'S COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY LECTURES.

(Published as *Critical and Historical Essays*).

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*For it is in the nature of the spiritual part of mankind to shrink from the earth, to aspire to something higher; a bird soaring in the blue above us has something of the ethereal; we give wings to our angels. On the other hand, a serpent impresses us as something sinister. Trees, with their strange fight against all the laws of gravity, striving upward unceasingly, bring us something of hope and faith; the sight of them cheers us. A land without trees is depressing and gloomy.*

*In spite of the strange twistings of ultra modern music, a simple melody still embodies the same pathos for us that it did for our grandparents.*

*We put our guest, the poetic thought, that comes to us like a homing bird from out the mystery of the blue sky—we put this confiding stranger straightway into that iron bed, the "sonata form," or perhaps even the third rondo form, for we have quite an assortment. Should the idea survive and grow too large for the bed, and if we have learned to love it too much to cut off its feet and thus make it fit (as did that old robber of Attica), why we run the risk of having some critic wise in his theoretical knowledge, say, as was and is said of Chopin, "He is weak in sonata form!"*

*In art our opinions must, in all cases, rest directly on the thing under consideration and not on what is written about it. Without a thorough knowledge of music, including its history and development, and, above all, musical "sympathy," individual criticism is, of course, valueless; at the same time the acquirement of this knowledge and sympathy is not difficult, and I hope that we may yet have a public in America that shall be capable of forming its own ideas, and not be influenced by tradition, criticism, or fashion.*

*Every person with even the very smallest love and sympathy for art possesses ideas which are valuable to that art. From the tiniest seeds sometimes the greatest trees are grown. Why, therefore, allow these tender germs of individualism to be smothered by that flourishing, arrogant bay tree of tradition—fashion, authority, convention, etc.*

*No art form is so fleeting and so subject to the dictates of fashion as opera. It has always been the plaything of fashion, and suffers from its changes.*

*Always respectable in his forms, no one else could have made music popular among the cultured classes as could Mendelssohn. This also had its danger; for if Mendelssohn had written an opera (the lack of which was so bewailed by the Philistines), it would have taken root all over Germany, and put Wagner back many years.*

*Handel's great achievement (besides being a fine composer) was to crush all life out of the then promising school of English music, the foundation of which had been so well laid by Purcell, Byrd, Morley, etc.*

*(On Mozart). His later symphonies and operas show us the man at his best. His piano works and early operas show the effect of the "virtuoso" style, with all its empty concessions to technical display and commonplace, ear-catching melody. . . . He possessed a certain simple charm of expression which, in its directness, has an element of pathos lacking in the comparatively jolly light-heartedness of Haydn.*

*Music can invariably heighten the poignancy of spoken words (which mean nothing in themselves), but words can but rarely, in fact I doubt whether they can ever, heighten the effect of musical declamation.*

*To hear and enjoy music seems sufficient to many persons, and an investigation as to the causes of this enjoyment seems to them superfluous. And yet, unless the public comes into closer touch with the lone poet than the objective state which accepts with the ears what is intended for the spirit, which hears the sounds and is deaf to their import, unless the public can separate the physical pleasure of music from its ideal significance, our art, in my opinion, cannot stand on a sound basis.*

*Music contains certain elements which affect the nerves of the mind and body, and thus possesses the power of direct appeal to the public—a power to a great extent denied to the other arts. This sensuous influence over the hearer is often mistaken for the aim and end of all music. . . . In declaring that the sensation of hearing music was pleasant to him, and that to produce that sensation was the entire mission of music, a certain English Bishop placed our art on a level with good things to eat and drink. Many colleges and universities of America consider music as a kind of boutonniere. . . . Low as it is, there is a possibility of building on such an estimate. Could such persons be made to recognize the existence of decidedly unpleasant music, it would be the first step toward a proper appreciation of the art and its various phases.*

*In my opinion, Johann Sebastian Bach, one of the world's mightiest tone poets, accomplished his mission, not by means of the contrapuntal fashion of his age, but in spite of it. The laws of canon and fugue are based upon as prosaic a foundation as those of the rondo and sonata form: I find it impossible to imagine their ever having been a spur or an incentive to poetic musical speech.*

*Overwhelmed by the new-found powers of suggestion in tonal tint and the riot of hitherto undreamed of orchestral combinations, we are forgetting that permanence in music depends upon melodic speech.*

## PREFACE

OWING to the high cost of book production at the present time, the use of illustrations, both musical and photographic, has been restricted in this book. It was decided only to fully illustrate the analysis of MacDowell's "*Indian*" *Suite for Orchestra* (*Op.* 48), this being a work less accessible to the general reader than the composer's well known pianoforte pieces.

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