

# A Maestro Is Dead

SEVERAL days before William G. Schmidt became too ill to appear at his studio on the campus, an interview with *The Sooner Magazine* was arranged for the following week.

It was to be the "profile of a maestro" whose students had gained national and international acclaim. It was to tell how William G. Schmidt, sitting in his old familiar studio in Norman, Oklahoma, regarded the life of a music teacher, what the success of his students meant to him, and it was to include some of the warmly personal incidents in his inspirational relation to his proteges who are headed for musical fame.

Then, Mr. Schmidt became too ill to return to his studio and the heart ailment from which he suffered snuffed out his existence. The loss of Mr. Schmidt had more than local implications.

Mr. Schmidt had a habit, when he was talking to someone in his studio, of looking out the south window high in the Fine Arts building to the inevitable white clouds of an Oklahoma horizon. His head wasn't exactly in the clouds, for he was a practical man, but his vision did extend beyond the borders of Oklahoma, past the boundaries of the Southwest—perhaps, to those places where opera as he knew it and loved it meant life and happiness.

To Mr. Schmidt, the world was a musical unit. He did not think of music in relation to this state, to this section of the country, to this nation—it was a world feeling for music he possessed.

He saw his students in relation to the music of the world. Many of them, of course, were never meant to rise to the ambitions he held for them. Others caught the spark of his zeal and developed according to the pattern that was an ideal with him.

In twenty-three years as a member of the voice department, he never lost that enthusiasm. Every student had potentialities in the musical world. A very, very small percentage of them ever went ahead as he would have them, but in those who did Mr. Schmidt found great happiness.

When Joseph Benton made his Metropolitan opera debut during the last year, Mr. Schmidt was confined to his bed with illness. News of Benton's successful plunge into Metropolitan was brought to his old teacher late the following morning when his strength was returning.

His first reaction was a feeling of happiness that Joe had possessed the courage and stamina to spend twelve years preparing for that moment. His second feeling was that of regret because he could not be

in New York City to hear his student sing *Manon* that first night when Richard Crooks' illness hoisted Joe to a leading role.

Shortly before that time, Mr. Schmidt had the privilege of spending an enjoyable day with another of his favorite pupils. Erik Rhodes, who was Ernest Sharpe on the campus, was visiting his parents in Oklahoma City during the Christmas holidays and had only a short time before returning to Hollywood and the motion picture studios.

He took off a day and drove to Norman to see Mr. Schmidt who was confined to his bed at that time. It wasn't an important matter, but it was a very definite tribute to the feeling Erik Rhodes had for his music teacher. Mr. Schmidt was genuinely fond of Ernest. (He always called him Ernest.) Mr. Schmidt suffered mentally during Ernest's lean years on Broadway when he was trying to break into opera.

He was thoroughly happy when Ernest was teamed with Fred Astaire and Clare Luce in the hit, *Gay Divorcee*, which was transplanted to London for a season after

a successful Broadway run. Then, when Ernest signed a movie contract and played in the motion picture production of the hit, Mr. Schmidt knew that the lean years were ended.

Mr. Schmidt had other pupils on the way to success and in each one his interest was consuming. Among them are Ruth Alexander Young, of the Denver opera company; Genevieve Taliaferro, of the Montreal opera company; Minnaetha Popejoy, assistant to Mr. de Segurola, manager of the Los Angeles opera company; and Wilda Griffin, now of the University voice department.

One of his favorites was Emily Stephenson, graduate of two years ago, who is completing her second year at the Julliard School of Music. Miss Stephenson, he believed, has a brilliant future ahead of her.

As a matter of history, Mr. Schmidt came to this country from Germany in 1899, when he was 12 years old. He was born at Gardelegen March 1, 1887. His parents settled at Lone Wolf, Oklahoma, and William came to the University and worked his way through, graduating from the school of music in 1912. He studied a year in Chicago and joined the University faculty the following year. In 1921, he studied abroad and returned to the faculty.

His father died at Lone Wolf last December. His mother and wife are still alive. Two fine children, William, sixteen years old, and Marianne, twelve years old, also are survivors.

## Grads Address Journalists

SIX University of Oklahoma graduates were speakers on the two-day program of the Southwestern Journalism Congress during April on the campus.

H. H. Herbert, director of the University school of journalism, was in charge of the Congress in his capacity as president of the press group. Hoyte Allen, senior journalism student, presided at the meetings of the Southwestern Students' Press club which was held in connection with the journalism congress.

Ralph T. Baker, '32M.A., secretary and field manager of the Kansas Press association, Topeka, was one of the six alumni speakers included on the extensive two-day program. He talked on "The Press United for Effective Action."

Charles E. Green, '24ex, managing editor of the *Austin (Texas) Statesman*, spoke on "The New Trend Toward Pictures."

"The News in Fast Company" was the subject of an address by Frank L. Dennis, '29as, editorial assistant on the staff of the *Daily Oklahoman*.

Charles A. Guy, '23as, editor and publisher of the *Lubbock (Texas) Avalanche*

and *Journal*, addressed the Congress on the subject of "Making a Newspaper the Town Spokesman."

Robert Whitehand, '33as, editorial board, *American Prefaces*, University of Iowa, spoke on "Fact and Fancy: Journalism and the Creative Arts."

"Women in Advertising" was the subject of Mrs. Ruth Smith Ferris, '30as, of the advertising staff of the *Altus Times-Democrat*.

Among the other important visiting speakers on the program were Nelson Antrim Crawford, editor, *Household Magazine*, Topeka, Kansas; Elmo Scott Watson, feature writer, Western Newspaper Union, and journalism lecturer, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois; and Jenkin Lloyd Jones, managing editor, the *Tulsa Tribune*.

The entire group was guest at a dinner arranged by the Oklahoma Publishing company in Oklahoma City. The group was taken on a tour of the new radio studios of WKY and visited the plant of the Oklahoma Publishing company.