

Will Benton Go to the Movies?

FOR as many years as *The Sooner Magazine* has been in existence, the rise of Joseph Benton, '20as, '21voice, in the operatic world has been heralded in these pages.

Almost everything there is to know about his life as an undergraduate, his training under William G. Schmidt, '12 music, his years of struggle abroad, his successes in Italy, his hurried trips back to the United States, his radio work, his appearance with the Chicago opera—all of these things have been told before.

So, that now as he reaches the goal of his lifetime dream—Metropolitan opera—there is little that can be said without repeating that which has already been written.

To the music world, he is a new star in the operatic firmament. But to his University friends and alumni, he is the same Joe Benton they have watched, pulled for and in whose continued success and gradual rise to the top they have found happiness.

It was a long struggle that started with a dozen years abroad and it all came to a climax with Joe's return home almost a year ago to visit his parents in Norman.

What happened in New York City to give him his opportunity was a national sensation. It was a "natural" news story. The Oklahoma boy got his chance to sing in Metropolitan when the great tenor, Richard Crooks, developed an illness two days before he was to appear.

Many Oklahomans were present for Benton's premier. Among them were Elgin Groseclose, '20as. Mrs. Groseclose, J. Franklin Deming, '24as. Mrs. Deming, Joseph A. Brandt, '21as. Ivin G. Richardson, '17as. Horace Taylor, '21as. Mrs. Louise Bierer Taylor, '18as. Mrs. Geneva Ballinger Woods, '19music. F. W. Woods. Merle Freeland, '32as. Emily Stephenson, '34music. and Jimmie Brill.

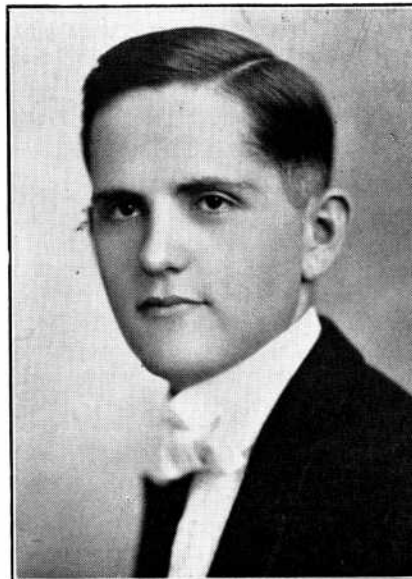
Although predictions are often hazardous it has been suggested frequently around the University that Benton probably will go to the movies during the next year. He has always frowned upon motion picture productions. but three factors have developed recently.

First, the movies have tried operatic productions and found that the American public is not as musically stupid as the picture magnates once supposed. The recent successes of Grace Moore and Lawrence Tibbett and other opera stars have raised the frightfully low motion picture standards. Joe Benton might fit in with the more intelligent policy.

Second, Joe Benton would have hurt his reputation as an opera singer by flirting with motion picture producers before he signed a Metropolitan contract. He would have lost much of his professional purity and reputation as a music lover had he done anything for pictures at an earlier date. Also, he would have had less prestige in Hollywood and would have had to take what was handed to him. His recent sensational rise has changed all this.

Third, the story of Joe Benton's life is natural motion picture material. But if the story is ever filmed, may someone with an ounce of feeling, please not inject a molasses love story into his career. So far as anyone knows, there is no dizzy blonde either in Norman, Oklahoma, Sayre, Oklahoma, or Rome, Italy, for whom Joe Benton sang his heart out and went through fire and brimstone to make good.

An interesting sidelight on Joe's Metropolitan premier was the United Press coverage of the event. The stories were written from New York by Ted Maloy, '29as, a member of the United Press staff. Maloy knew Benton when they were residents of Norman. Few newspaper persons were in a better position to write the story.



Here is Joe Benton when he was a University Glee Club singer back in the '20s. As well as fine tenor, Benton was noted in those days for his whistling.

H. I. Phillips, Noted Columnist, Rimes of Joe Benton

Following is part of the popular column, "The Once Over" by H. I. Phillips, which was printed shortly after Joe Benton's Metropolitan debut:

Glee Club Boy Makes Good

("The new sensation of the Metropolitan opera is Joseph Bentonelli, really Joseph Benton, a Sayre, Okla., boy and college glee club singer. In Italy the Fascists made him bill himself as Bentonelli."—News item.)

Joseph Benton of Oklahoma
Went to Paris and to Roma;
He studied and he sang so well he
Came back as Signor Bentonelli.

His daddy was a lumberman,
And in the forest oft he ran;
Which may be why his voice today
Has such fine timbre, so they say.

Joe's boyhood days were spent in Sayre
Where singers got the well-known air;
Far out west in the open spaces
Where men shoot men who hold five aces.

One day when but a lad he sang—
His voice throughout the village rang;
His folks they heard with deep despair . . .
"A tenor! Think of that, in Sayre!"

Out in the wild and wooly spaces
Where men are men and mostly basses,
They shook their heads and whispered low,
"What'll become of Little Joe?"

His parents sent him off to college
To fill him full of higher knowledge;
He quickly went Phi Beta "Kappy"
Which pleased his ma and pleased his pappy.

A doctor Joseph aimed to be
With his Phi Beta Kappa key,
But fate had other plans for Joe
And said, "What! . . . Doctor Benton? . . . No!"

When fate makes up its mind, you're sunk,
And opposition is the bunk;
Soon Joseph took a little trip—
He'd won a musical scholarship!

We next find him in Nice so fair;
Oh, Oklahoma; Oh, Sayre; Oh, Sayre!
To Italy in time he goes
To study . . . and dodge Major Bowes!

So marked the beauty of his voice
The Romans gave the lad no choice
But to achieve wide-world acclaim
With an Italian sounding name.

Thus Bentonelli, tenor rare,
Operatic star from out of Sayre!
From Oklahoma, what a man!
To make the Metropolitan!

A glee club tenor of the west
The boy could outsing all the rest;
The moral of this tale and song:
All glee club tenors don't go wrong!