



Music Notes



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Remembering John W. Schaum

• 1905-1988 •

by Wesley Schaum

It has been twenty years since the death of my father, John W. Schaum, on July 18, 1988. He left a considerable legacy of musical achievements. His piano teaching career began in the late 1920's. He also did a little composing during the 30's and early 40's. It was from 1944 to a few months before his death that he was most active as a composer and arranger, creating many dozens of albums and hundreds of sheet music pieces. Between 1944 and 1947 he produced an amazing quantity of music for the Belwin publishing company. A great many of the albums written during those years have been updated and are still popular. This is a tribute to the timeless merit of his writings.

I still hear from teachers who have fond memories of my father. They recall the special pleasure of meeting him at one of his workshops or their pride in joining with him playing a piano duet. They tell how his artistry, personality and musical philosophy touched them, and ultimately, their students.

Continuing His Work

Had he lived, I'd like to believe that he would have been amazed and proud of how his company has grown and progressed. Unfortunately, he died shortly before the groundbreaking for a new building which he helped to plan. It had been his long time dream to have his own building to house a music school and his music publishing business. This building has served us well during the past 20 years. The original floor plan was designed with sufficient foresight to enable the business to grow and also to accommodate new technologies and greatly expanded production facilities.

Schaum Publications is the continuation of his work. Knowing the story of John W. Schaum is to know how our publishing company was conceived and built, where we are now and what we envision for the future.



The Schaum Heritage:

by Wesley Schaum

It all started when John Schaum decided to make a career of piano teaching in the late 1920's. Dad began working as a private teacher. Gradually his clientele grew, and in 1933 he organized the Schaum Piano School. The teaching faculty eventually expanded to a point where the school had eleven teaching studios on the third floor of an office building on the east side of Milwaukee, just a few blocks from Lake Michigan. The collective teaching experiences in his school became the fountainhead for his music writings.

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My father's struggle to earn a living as a piano teacher during the 1930's economic depression produced some remarkable results. His pioneer class piano teaching work is featured in a yellowed newspaper clipping from the education section of the *Christian Science Monitor* dated Saturday, May 11, 1935. At the top of the front page is a photo three columns wide. It shows one of his classes with children seated at eight pianettes (small four-octave keyboards). He obviously was very proud of this national publicity, carefully keeping six copies of the clipping.

One of his particularly successful projects was to compile an annual promotional booklet with photographs of his students at the piano in their homes. A professional photographer was engaged. Copies of the booklet were mailed to hundreds of homes in the vicinity of his piano school. After several years, this booklet became a status symbol for socially prominent families. As a result, my father became one of the most

sought after teachers in the city.

The Schaum Musical Star Co. was another of Dad's enterprises. In 1936 there were no award stickers available for students other than plain gummed stars. My father designed gold and silver award stars printed with musical symbols, which were packaged and offered to teachers nationwide.

He was constantly looking for better student materials, frequently visiting the three sheet music dealers in downtown Milwaukee. His favorite music magazine was *The Etude*, published monthly by the Theodore Presser Co. It contained samples of Presser's latest published piano solos and duets along with articles about teaching.

His first published works were piano solos in sheet music form, issued during the 1930's. Boston, Sam Fox, Presser, Summy and Willis were among the companies who published these early works.

My father often experimented by creating special arrangements, original pieces and studies for individual students.

My father often experimented by creating special arrangements, original pieces and studies for individual students. Many years of accumulating and careful cataloging of these ideas and works resulted in his publishing several of his own books for use at the Schaum Piano School and served as resources for his later books.

In 1941, Dad published his own first book titled, *Piano Fun for Boys and Girls*. In the foreword of this book he states, "In examining the other types of methods, we have found that the majority ignore the interest factor of the student. They take it for granted that the student has a burning passion for music and will do any old dry piece of work just because it appears in the book. They forget that youngsters have to have interesting and enjoyable material or else they will quickly run out of enthusiasm. And so we present the *Piano Fun Book* for children to enjoy." This book was later refined and published by Belwin as the "Schaum Piano Course, Pre-A Book."

A \$15 Mistake

In 1942, Dad made an arrangement of the "Marines Hymn." The typical royalty paid at that time was one or two cents per copy sold. As an alternative, some publishers offered to buy out the composer's rights for a fixed fee. Having received only very small royalties from previous sheet music, he decided to sell the "Marines Hymn" to the publisher for \$15. This piece was released in the midst of the patriotic fervor generated by World War II. The Schaum arrangement of the "Marines Hymn" purportedly sold over one million copies. Although a one cent royalty would have earned him over \$10,000, my father never got more than the original \$15. However, the success of the "Marines Hymn" arrangement attracted the attention of Max Winkler, the president of Belwin Publications. This contact resulted in a collaboration between them which produced a remarkable output of music.



The Belwin Success Story

A series of fortunate circumstances contributed to my father's success. Even his birth date worked in his favor. He was too young to be involved in the First World War and a bit too old for the military draft during World War II.

My father's first major music commission was in 1943, when he was asked by Max Winkler to make fifty piano solos arrangements to be issued as sheet music. Additional assignments would depend upon their success. The next year, a second commission of arrangements called for fifty pieces by fifty different composers. During this period, Dad was still giving lessons full time.

1945 was a particularly remarkable year. During this year alone, all nine books of the "Schaum Piano Course" were written and produced! This achievement is testimony to my father's organizational skills. Many previous years of careful accumulation and cataloging of teaching ideas were put to good use. His own music library was also a contributing factor.

As World War II was ending in 1945, paper was in short supply. By a stroke of good fortune, the Belwin Co. was able to obtain plenty of paper to print the new "Schaum Piano Course," while publishers of competitive methods were hampered by shortages. This contributed to the rapid success of my father's course.

At the time, other method books were labeled by grade number. My father found that there was great confusion and dismay among students and parents when comparing Grade 1 in music and Grade 1 in elementary school. At Max Winkler's suggestion, the books of the "Schaum Piano Course" were labeled by alphabet letters instead of grades. In addition, each of the early grades was split into two books. For example, the A Book was Grade 1 and the B Book was Grade 1½. Another innovation was to use a *different color* for the cover of each of the nine books in the series.



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