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## Closing Chord

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**Jim Braun** arrived in Los Angeles from Seattle seven years ago with one burning ambition—to own a theatre organ. He was well schooled in the technique of servicing and restoring player pianos and he soon built up a reputation for excellent work among player piano aficionados, and a remunerative trade.



Jim Braun

The profits went into buying organ parts and a building in which to house the instrument. Jim was a perfectionist and he tackled his project accordingly. Every spare moment was devoted to the organ project. Not being financially able to buy the kind of building he felt his instrument deserved, he did most of the construction work himself on an addition to

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### VOX POP, continued

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it was a concert by Kay McAbee with a silent movie cued by Tom Ferree (the Uniphone's owner and champion). For May it was to be a joint ATOE-AGO chapter meeting and the possibility that some AGOer would play some classics on the Uniphone. Reginald Foort had proved it a worthy instrument for concert music with a surprise rendition of Bach's *Tocatta and Fuge in D Minor* during his stint at the Rivoli last December.

In San Francisco, Lyn Larsen was having the time of his life, and loving it. Lyn, now the staff organist at the Avenue theatre (the silent movie house with the big Wurlitzer), is a "natural" at cueing silent films reports Dewey Cagle (Dewey spends his weekends there). Audiences are getting larger and part-owner Ed Stout credits Lyn's close-fitting, sensitive scores to a large extent.

his Inglewood home. Being something of a "loner," this was no great sacrifice. Nothing was more important than getting his organ playing. Jim was never what might be termed a joiner; he sometimes attended TOC and ATOE concerts but never became affiliated with any organ club. There just wasn't time.

Jim teamed with Chuck Smith and the project was well under way, with the building completed and much of the organ installed, when Jim learned that he had Leukemia. That was about two years ago. But at a point where many people are inclined to give up, Jim pitched in with renewed vigor. Now he had real reason to hurry because he wasn't certain as to how much time he had left. He never complained to friends or even let on how ill he was and many learned the extent of his acting ability only by the notice in the newspapers.

Jim Braun, 25, died on March 17, leaving a mother and father in Seattle. The future of his 22-rank Wurlitzer and its special building in Inglewood, California, was assured by the determination of Jim's partner, Chuck Smith, to complete the project. Chuck plans to make the organ and building available to organ clubs and concert groups, with rental fees to go toward a lasting memorial to Jim Braun—a Leukemia Foundation which will bear Jim's name.

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**Bart Wright** was a tall, skinny guy with eyesight so bad that he had to turn out the console lights in order to see the picture on the screen, ever so dimly. Reading from the rack was out of the question, so he memorized thousands of compositions needed to cue silent movies. If his personality seemed somewhat lacklustre it was because he was a shy man, but one who, nevertheless, made an imposing figure in the glare of the spotlight as he played a solo or took his bow. In the middle and late '20's his gaunt figure and sharp features might be seen at a number of Central New York theatres before the show or on break—but never at the console unless it was spotlighted because as previously mentioned, he did all his playing sans console and rack lights. That is a summary of the surface impressions one was apt to get of Bartholomew P. Wright, but there is lots more. If one took the trouble to cultivate "Bart" Wright, a warm and kindly human being materialized, one who loved music and the theatre organ. And when he started playing a theatre organ, an entirely different Bart Wright came to the fore. He used the tone colors of the solo-voiced Marr and Coltons in the Syracuse Empire and Regent theatres with a flair for drama but always in excellent taste. His weaving of "leit motifs" during silent film scores was a study in both arranging

and composing, because Bart Wright was gifted not only with an ear for music but with the ability to compose themes and settings as needed.

He first gained public notice playing opposite Paul H. Forster and Lew Baker at the Syracuse Empire, although he had played in other houses (the Syracuse Eckel and the Rome Capitol) for some years. His theatre career came to full fruition when he replaced Herbert Henderson shortly after the opening of the Syracuse Regent's 3-13 Marr and Colton organ in 1927 (for several years the largest TO in Syracuse). There he played not only for silent movies but presented top-flight "sing-alongs" (then called "organlogues"). He left the Regent to open Harry Gilbert senior's atmospheric neighborhood Riviera theatre on South Salina Street in 1929, a "talkie" house but one where Bart's "Organlogues", played on a 2-6 Wurlitzer, flourished for the next few years.



Bart Wright Circa 1926

As the demand for organists lessened in the early '30's, Bart could be heard playing his song slide novelties at the Syracuse (later the Civic) theatre's 3-10 Marr and Colton, where burlesque was the usual program. They even gave him marquee billing along with a succession of "top bananas." During this period he often returned to his beloved Regent organ for late-night broadcasts from WFBL. Little was heard of him after 1935, the year the Regent was remodeled minus the organ, which was junked.

Bart Wright was the son of a Syracuse police chief, and had two brothers, Leroy and George Wright (the latter was a doctor). In later years, Bart turned to education, and the last five years of his life were invested in teaching at a home for retarded children. In earlier years he had quite a number of organ students but only two can be recalled. One, a gifted singer and entertainer, Jackie Shannon, quit the secular life to become Rev. John Shannon. The other, Stu Green, showed up years later as one of the editors of this magazine.

Bart Wright died on May 1, after a brief illness in the city he left but briefly in his span of 75 years.—Syracuse, New York. He would like the way the Herald-Journal headed his obituary; "B. P. Wright Dies: Theatre Organist."