

# The Orpheum of Old

BY MICHAEL WRIGHT

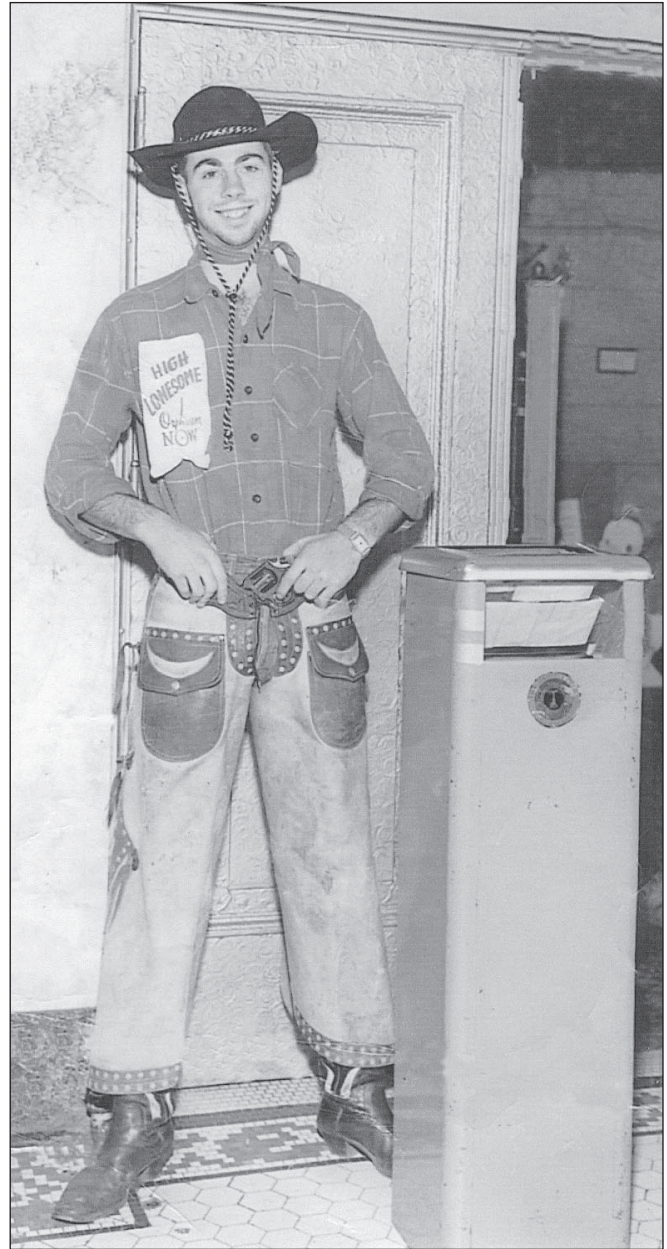
In Spokane, places like the Orpheum Theatre, on the east side of Howard (between Riverside and Main), played movies that still live in the hearts of my father's generation; movies like *High Lonesome* and *Prehistoric Women*. Actors like John Drew Barrymore, Chill Wills, Loretta Luez, and Alan Nixon made their lives more fun.

My father, Bob Wright, worked at the Orpheum in the early 1950s as a doorman. It was one of his first jobs as a young man. His duties included dressing in costumes that portrayed a scene from the current movie playing to give the theatre a more enchanting ambience. His favorite part was dressing up in costume like the characters. My father's favorite costume was the cowboy for *High Lonesome*. However, he also enjoyed dressing up in the leopard leotard for *Prehistoric Women*.

"Me and Coral Carr," my father says, "had to run all through Spokane dressed like that. She would chase after me with a club in her hand while I held the sign in front of me. For about two hours of our shift for a couple weeks in a row, we had to run all over downtown Spokane to draw people to the theatre," he recalls. One of his other jobs at the Orpheum was to watch for "the young people sneaking in the back."

Senator Jimmy Keefe was the manager of the Orpheum at that time. The secretary was Anna-Jean Wertz, cashiers were Coral Carr and Herta Schmidt, usherettes were Annabelle McKelvie, ? Castleberry, and ? Moreau. Kim Devereaux was the lighting director, and he went on to be the stage manager for the Coliseum. Morrie Nimmer, who later owned and operated the Y Drive-In, was also a manager at the Orpheum. At this time there were twelve theatres in Spokane: Orpheum, Fox, State, Bandbox, Post, Liberty, Granada, Ritz, Unique, Rainbow, Rex, and Garland.

My father met lots of interesting people while working at the Orpheum. While working with the senator he learned a lot about politics: "It really was a nice thing. The people were good and I don't remember a single bad thing from working there." ☺



**Dressing the Part** — Bob Wright, as an usher, would dress up in a costume that depicted a character in the movie that was showing at the Orpheum. Here he is a cowboy from the "High Lonesome." On the facing page, he dressed up as a caveman for "Prehistoric Women," along with his partner, Coral Carr.