

# Pianist's 'Autumn Leaves' topped pop charts in '50s

LOS ANGELES — Roger Williams, a virtuoso pianist, topped the Billboard pop chart in the 1950s and played for nine U.S. presidents during a long career. Mr. Williams died Saturday of complications from pancreatic cancer at his home in Los Angeles, according to his former publicist, Rob Wilcox. He was 87. "Roger was one of the greatest pia-

record of all time.

nists in the world and could play anything to classical music to jazz," said Sen. Orrin Hatch of Utah, a longtime friend who also is a musician. Mr. Williams' 1955 hit "Autumn Leaves" was the only piano instrument-tal to reach No. 1 on the Billboard pop charts. It remains the best-selling piano

He was born Louis Wertz in Nebraska and started playing piano at age 3. As a teenager, he had a 15-minute radio show on KRNT-AM in Des Moines, Iowa. Later he hosted a program on WHO-AM, where he met the station's young sports announcer, Ronald "Dutch" Reagan. They were friends for more than 60 years. Mr. Williams moved to New York

to study jazz at the Juilliard School of Music. He was signed to Kapp Records, where "Autumn Leaves became an instant hit.

He followed it up with a string of hits including "Born Free," "The Impossible Dream," "Theme From Somewhere In Time," and "Lara's Theme from Dr. Zhivago."



Roger Williams AP