



## KANSAS LEGEND BIOGRAPHY

### Wilbur Dorsey “Buck” Clayton (1911-1991)

Buck Clayton was an American jazz musician remembered for his brassy trumpet playing, melodic improvisations, and his abilities as a songwriter, arranger, and bandleader. Clayton’s music career spanned from 1928 to 1991 and was built playing engagements across the globe. His jam sessions were unforgettable, as well as his lifelong contributions to American music.



Born Wilbur Dorsey Clayton in Parsons, Kan., Clayton grew up listening to music at his father’s church. As a teenager, he began playing the trumpet in the church band while his mother played the organ. After George E. Lee’s band visited Clayton’s hometown, he knew he had found his calling. Clayton left Kansas for California after graduating from high school to begin his professional music career.

Clayton spent time with Duke Ellington’s Orchestra before taking over Earl Dancer’s band and traveling with the group to China. In 1934, the group began playing an extended engagement in Shanghai, becoming one of the first group’s to spend time in the Orient. After two years overseas, Clayton returned to Los Angeles and started the group Fourteen Gentlemen from Harlem.



During the summer of 1936, Clayton returned to Kansas City to play with Count Basie’s band at the Reno Club. The group’s fame soared, and Clayton enjoyed the spotlight in countless solos, as well as recording sessions with Billie Holiday and Lester Young. Clayton was drafted in 1943, and after spending three years serving his country, he returned to New York playing at Café Society and with Jazz at the Philharmonic.

Another group of Clayton’s spent time touring in Europe during the early 1950s. Clayton also played with Jimmy Rushing, Joe Bushkin and Frank Sinatra, cutting jam sessions under the Columbia record label. Clayton broke into the mainstream with recordings including his album “Jazz Spectacular.” In 1955, he appeared in the “Benny Goodman Story” and later worked with the artist himself.



Clayton returned to traveling and performing abroad in the late ‘50s and through the next decade. He spent time in Japan, Australia, New Zealand and numerous cities throughout Europe until undergoing lip surgery in 1967. While recovering, Clayton focused on composing and arranging for other groups. He returned to performing in the late ‘70s and toured until he could play no longer.

The last years of Clayton’s life were spent arranging and composing while teaching at Hunter College in New York. In 1986, his semi-autobiography “Buck Clayton’s Jazz World” was published, and he started his Swinging Dream Band. Clayton composed more than 100 pieces for the group and toured internationally with the band until his death in 1991 at age 80.

A great deal of memorabilia from Clayton’s storied musical career can be found in the Special Collections of Miller Nichols Library at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

