

Lewis "Lew" Anderson, 84

May 7, 1922 - May 14, 2006

HAWTHORNE, NY — Lewis "Lew" Anderson was born May 7, 1922, in Kirkman, Shelby County, the son of Lloyd Anderson, a railroad telegrapher, and Nell Whisler. When one of his sisters decided she no longer wanted to play the clarinet, Lew inherited the instrument and a career in the music business began. He soon became involved in school musical activities and started his own band playing local engagements. A year at Junior College in Fort Dodge followed, and while there he received a scholarship to Drake College in Des Moines which he attended for two years. He left Drake to begin his professional musical life and by now was writing arrangements for groups with whom he was playing. When asked one time where he studied arranging, he replied, "On the bandstand, watching and listening." He became known as one of the best at both instrumental and vocal arranging.

In 1942 during WWII he enlisted in the Naval Air Corps and began flying. He soon resigned and was sent to Great Lakes boot camp, eventually being assigned to a submarine tender in the Pacific. The officer in charge, a musician, helped Lew assemble his own band. He also saw his share of action in the Pacific.

After leaving the service he joined the Carlos Molinas Latin Orchestra, contributing American dance arrangements to that band. He played as well with many other "territory" bands as they were known touring the Midwest. He was the final Clarabelle the Clown, who captivated young baby boomers on the Howdy Doody Show. Long mute as Clarabell, Anderson broke the clown's silence in the show's final episode in 1960. With trembling lips and a visible tear in his eye, he spoke the show's final words: "Goodbye, kids." Though Anderson was not the only man to play "Buffalo Bob" Smith's mute sidekick, he was the best, Smith said in his memoir. The first to play the mute clown was Bob Keeshan, who later became known as Captain Kangaroo. With the Peanut Gallery looking on, Anderson used bicycle horns to give yes and no answers. For more expressive moments, he wielded a bottle of seltzer. The show, which launched in 1947 when televisions were still a novelty, was the first network weekday children's show. Anderson joined "Doodyville," a circus town peopled with puppets and human actors and watched by a Peanut Gallery of kids, in the mid 1950's.

Though his fame as Clarabell followed him throughout his life, Anderson was also a success as a musician and bandleader. In recent years, his All-American Big Band appeared Friday nights at New York's Birdland jazz club. Anderson lived in South Salem, NY. He died May 14, 2006, in Hawthorne, NY of prostate cancer at age 84.

Lew was preceded in death by two sisters, Jean Todd and Loyce Beaman. He is survived by his wife, Peggy; son, Christopher (Margaret) of Ridgefield, CT; son, Lewis, Jr. (Kathy) Cohen-Anderson of Providence, RI; grandchildren, Jack, Parker and Kristen of Ridgefield, CT; stepdaughters, Lorie George (David) Klein of Danbury, CT, Halley Leffler (Michael) and their children, Madison and Dyson of Sandusky, OH; a nephew, Jeffrey Bonneville; a niece, Suzanne Hayes (Tom) and their children, Sarah and Andrew; and several other nieces and nephews.