

# Joe Sanders

Musician

1896-1965

by Sara Nyman

The advent of radio broadcasting in the early 1920s made a local Kansas City musical group popular all over the country. Joe Sanders together with Carleton Coon formed a band that became known as the Coon-Sanders Nighthawks. They started out playing at the Plantation Grill in the Hotel Muehlebach, and local radio station WDAF broadcast their show across the airwaves.

Joe L. Sanders was born in Thayer, Kansas, in 1896. He spent part of his childhood in Belton, Missouri, and moved to Kansas City in his early teens. He started his musical performances as a boy soprano in local church choirs. After a stint in the Army in 1918-19, he pursued his musical career and eventually became an accomplished piano player, singer, conductor of his own bands, and composer, with over 100 songs published. He liked to refer to himself as the "Ole Left Hander," a name derived from his baseball pitching accomplishments.

Sanders and Carleton Coon took their band on the road, playing in college towns and other entertainment venues in the Midwest. It wasn't long until Chicago and the Blackhawk Restaurant became their home base. They made records on the Victor label and traveled mainly to engagements all over the Midwest and points eastward, garnering a loyal following as they went. They finally ended up playing in New York City. Unfortunately, Carleton Coon died in 1932, and the original group fell apart.

Sanders continued to lead his own band during part of the 1930s, 1940s, and early 1950s. He even wrote motion picture music scores and is credited with co-writing the music for the movie *King Kelly of the U.S.A.*

Eventually, Sanders and his second wife Trudy returned to Kansas City where he died in 1965. Joe and Trudy are buried in Kansas City's Mt. Moriah Cemetery. Before he died he was able to see the formation of the Coon-Sanders Fan Club, started in 1959 by two men who heard the Coon-Sanders Nighthawks on the radio when they were young.



**Sources**

Edmiston, Fred W. *The Coon-Sanders Nighthawks: "The Band That Made Radio Famous."* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2003.

Joe Sanders Collection (SC1-1), Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library, Kansas City, Missouri.

*The Kansas City Times*, 15 May 1965.

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