

Arts & ENTERTAINMENT



Clarence Clemons (left) and Bruce Springsteen perform on the NBC 'Today' television program on Sept. 28, 2007.

Influential Sax Player Larger-than-Life

Clarence Clemons spent much of his life with 'the Boss'

(AP) -- Clarence Clemons, the larger-than-life saxophone player for the E Street Band who was one of the key influences in Bruce Springsteen's life and music through four decades, is being remembered.

Clemons, 69, died Saturday night after being hospitalized about a week earlier following a stroke.

Springsteen called the loss "immeasurable."

Known as the Big Man for his imposing 6-foot-5-inch, 270-plus pound frame, Clemons and his ever-present saxophone spent much of his life with The Boss, and his booming saxophone solos became a signature sound for the E Street Band on many key songs, including "Jungleland," a triumphant solo he spent 16 hours perfecting, and "Born To Run."

In recent years, Clemons had been slowed by health woes. He endured major spinal surgery in January 2010 and, at the 2009 Super Bowl, Clemons rose from a wheelchair to perform with Springsteen after double knee replacement surgery.

But his health seemed to be improving. In May, he performed with Lady Gaga on the season finale of "American Idol," and performed on two songs on her "Born This Way"

album. Just this week, Lady Gaga's video with Clemons, "The Edge of Glory," debuted.

Outside The Stone Pony, the legendary Asbury Park, N.J., rock club where Springsteen, Clemons and other E Street Band members cut their teeth in the 1970s, Phil Kuntz stopped to place a small yellow flower on a decorative white fence. Nearby, someone taped a handwritten sign that read simply "RIP Big Man."

Reaction came from across the entertainment industry.

"Clarence Clemons was an electric, generous, sweet spirit. Taught me how to look cool with a sax. Goodbye Big Man," tweeted actor Rob Lowe.

Added Questlove, drummer for the Roots: "RIP Clarence Clemons. A True Legend. Will be absolutely missed."

An original member — and the oldest member — of the E Street Band, Clemons also performed with the Grateful Dead, the Jerry Garcia Band, and Ringo Starr's All Star Band. He recorded with a wide range of artists including Aretha Franklin, Roy Orbison and Jackson Browne. He

Born in Norfolk, Va., Clemons was the grandson of a Baptist minister and began playing the

He was influenced by R&B artists such as King Curtis and Junior Walker. But his dreams originally focused on football. He played for Maryland State College, and was to try out for the Cleveland Browns when he got in a bad car accident

that made him retire from the sport for good.

His energies then focused on music.

In 1971, Clemons was playing with Norman Seldin & the Joyful Noise when he heard about rising singer-songwriter named Springsteen.

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