

Doc Severinsen (1927-)

By Norman Leyden

Carl H. "Doc" Severinsen's career began in the 1940s, and more than sixty years later, the famed trumpeter is still going strong and showing no signs of stopping. He still performs and conducts, as well as designs and manufactures instruments for Destino custom trumpets.

Born on July 7, 1927, in the small town of Arlington on the Columbia River, Severinsen was named after his father, the town dentist and, reputedly, a capable violinist. The two Severinsens became known locally as "Little Doc" and "Big Doc." At the age of seven, probably inspired by hearing the Arlington High School band parading through town on Memorial Day, Carl asked his father for a trombone. Arlington's small music store could provide only a trumpet. With his father as his first teacher, "Little Doc" made rapid progress and soon became a member of the high school band. A few years later, at the age of twelve, he won the prestigious Music Educators National Contest.

After he finished high school, Doc (no longer "Little Doc") Severinsen and his trumpet saw service in the U.S. Army in World War II. After the war, the Big Band era was still in full swing, and over the next several years his reputation as a soloist grew rapidly. Many top bandleaders, including Charlie Bearnet, Tommy Dorsey, and Benny Goodman, vied for his services.

In 1950, the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) in New York hired Severinsen as a studio staff musician, a prized and lucrative position attained by only the finest players in the profession. After a few seasons as an NBC staffer, Severinsen joined the Tonight Show Band as first trumpet, and in 1967, became the program's music director. It was a position he would hold until long-time host Johnny Carson retired from television in 1992. The final two decades of his tenure with the Tonight Show saw Severinsen at the top of his form, leading his Big Band, delighting audiences with his repartee and garish attire, but always demonstrating musical integrity and total command of the trumpet.

Over the years, Severinsen has appeared in concert twenty-two times with the Oregon Symphony. In 2006, he moved to San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. He continues to perform as guest conductor and soloist.

Doc Severinsen's discography includes dozens of albums, ranging from ballads, blues, big band, and jazz fusion to classical. He received a Grammy Award for "best jazz instrumental performance, big band" for *Doc Severinsen and the Tonight Show Band*, featuring his well-developed high-note range. Another listeners' favorite is his *Unforgettably Doc—Music of Love & Romance* with the Cincinnati Pops Orchestra, Erich Kunzel conducting. Severinsen's conducting career includes guest appearances with symphony orchestras in Phoenix, Buffalo, Colorado, Philadelphia, Seattle, Spokane, Minnesota, and Milwaukee, and the New York Pops at Carnegie Hall.

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