

# Frank Wizarde

Whizzo the Clown, Television Personality  
1916-1987

by Dory DeAngelo

The Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus played at Kemper Arena the day that Whizzo the Clown died in 1987. Whizzo, Kansas City's own television entertainer, was Frank Wizarde, a boy born in Westmoreland, Kansas who joined his parents in a vaudeville act when he was only six years old.

Vaudeville was popular entertainment in the early part of the twentieth century. Comics, singers, dancers, and acrobats appeared in thousands of theaters across the country. The Wiziardes performed somersaults and other acrobatics on a thin wire, seven feet from the stage floor, ten times every day. Frank Wizarde grew up watching from backstage, later giving credit to these performances as his clown training.

By the early 1930s, vaudeville was dying, losing audiences to movie houses and radio. Wizarde soon started working in radio, which brought him to Kansas City and led him to television, transforming him into Whizzo the Clown.

In the early days of television, networks did not program daytime shows, so local stations had to fill the time slots. Wizarde worked as a director at KMBC-TV, and the station asked him to come up with an idea for a children's show. His idea was Whizzo.

The show went on the air in 1954. Whizzo jumped out from behind a curtain, tripped over items scattered around his set and sang the song he composed, "Who's always smiling, never sad? It's Whizzo!" He tried tricks that usually fizzled and then introduced cartoon films. Kids were invited to the show to be dressed in clown costumes and join the singing and dancing. Nearly every kid in town knew the Whizzo song, and many of today's baby boomers can sing all of the verses.

Whizzo remained on KMBC-TV for 15 years before moving to KCMO-TV and then to a Topeka television station. He was invited by President Reagan in 1983 to entertain children at the White House's annual Easter egg hunt.



Kansas City's Mayor H. Roe Bartle once predicted that if kids could vote, Whizzo would be Mayor of Kansas City.

**Sources**

*The Kansas City Times*, 27 Nov. 1980; 12 Sept.1987.

*The Kansas City Star*, 8 April 1983.

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