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Biography

The Vanguard Jazz Orchestra is the current title for a band that began its life as the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis and The Jazz Orchestra in 1966 and has performed continuously over 50 years.

In 1966 cornetist, composer, arranger, Thad Jones and drummer Mel Lewis founded a band in New York. Having settled in New York after leaving their respective touring jobs with Basie and Kenton, Thad and Mel along with many of their colleagues needed an outlet for their creative energies and relief from the tedium of the studio work.

With a handful of arrangements they approached legendary club owner Max Gordon and were booked at the Village Vanguard for 3 Mondays in February. Critical acclaim, awards and international success followed but in 1979, tired of frequent traveling and the economic uncertainty that even great jazz musicians endure in America, Thad left the band to accept leadership of the Danish Radio Orchestra in Copenhagen.

Mel decided to continue the band now billed as Mel Lewis and the Jazz Orchestra and enlisted the talents of his old friend and former band member Bob Brookmeyer who, miraculously was just returning to active playing and composing in New York. The band not only survived but with Brookmeyer's writing continued the innovation and influence that Thad and Mel had began. Bob moved on to other projects and ultimately also settled in Europe, the new material coming from within the band now.

In 1990 the band would endure a terrible blow when Mel Lewis died after a 5 year battle with cancer. For the members, all of whom had been there 5 years and several over 10, losing Mel was a deep family tragedy, for great bands invariably become families. The decision was made to move forward as a cooperative endeavour with the music as its front man.

So three weeks have become a permanent gig spanning over five decades and another name change; The Vanguard Jazz Orchestra. Several of the current key members played for Thad, so the original precepts of sound and swing are proudly held and displayed while the other original precepts of creativity and experimentation are nurtured and encouraged.

The Village Vanguard is still a great place to be on a Monday night no matter which side of the bandstand you're on.

Over the past decades The Vanguard Jazz Orchestra has received multiple Grammy's and Grammy Nominations for every recording they made.



After winning the Grammy for *Monday Night Live At The Village Vanguard*, the following two CD's; *Forever Lasting/ Live In Tokyo*; and *OverTime/ The Music of Bob Brookmeyer*, both received Grammy Nominations.

The 50th anniversary will be celebrated with 8 consecutive nights of performances at the Village Vanguard (178 7th Ave. South) beginning February 1 through 8, 2016. and with concerts throughout the year in performance centers across the globe.

The band (Personnel)

Director / John Mosca
Orchestra Manager / Douglas Purviance
Artistic Director / Dick Oatts
Composer in Residence/ Jim McNeely
Project Director / Thomas Bellino

TRUMPETS/FLUGELHORNS

Nick Marchione (lead)
Tanya Darby
Terell Stafford
Scott Wendholt

TROMBONES

John Mosca (lead)
Luis Bonilla
Jason Jackson
Douglas Purviance (bass trombone)

WOODWINDS

Dick Oatts (lead alto and soprano saxophones, flute)
Billy Drewes (alto and soprano saxophones, flute, clarinet)
Rich Perry (tenor saxophone, flute)
Ralph LaLama (tenor saxophone, flute, clarinet)
Gary Smulyan (baritone saxophone, bass clarinet)

RHYTHM SECTION

Jim McNeely (piano)
John Riley (drums)
David Wong (bass)



The Vanguard Jazz Orchestra
Established by Thad Jones and Mel Lewis
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