



History of the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra

Founded as Thad Jones/Mel Lewis and The Jazz Orchestra

Thad Jones, who was featured in the Count Basie Orchestra, and Los Angeles based drummer Mel Lewis from the Stan Kenton Orchestra, started the band in 1966 with some of the top studio musicians in New York City.

The beautiful melodies and unique arrangements of Thad Jones enchanted audiences worldwide. The mixture of the music from diverse backgrounds created their innovative sound and the band was quickly recognized as a world-class big band.

Mel Lewis and The Jazz Orchestra

In 1978, Thad Jones moved to Denmark but the band continued as Mel Lewis and The Jazz Orchestra. In addition to the masterpieces by Thad, they actively employed new and original compositions and arrangements by Bob Brookmeyer, Jim McNeely and others. Those new arrangements were complex and avant-garde, but they stayed true to their fundamental band sound and swing. Their excellent artistry sustained and grew their high reputation.

Vanguard Jazz Orchestra

By changing its name to the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, the orchestra created its own identity after losing both of its leaders. The ensemble cultivated its rich history while commissioning new music that made them the prototype of innovative big band music. 2016 marks 50 years of continued performances of Monday Night Live at the world's premiere jazz club, The Village Vanguard.