

FROM ORIGINAL ANALOG MASTER

2^xHD
FUSION

thad jones/ mel lewis orchestra

all my yesterdays

THE DEBUT 1966 RECORDINGS
AT THE VILLAGE VANGUARD



DSD

Direct Stream Digital

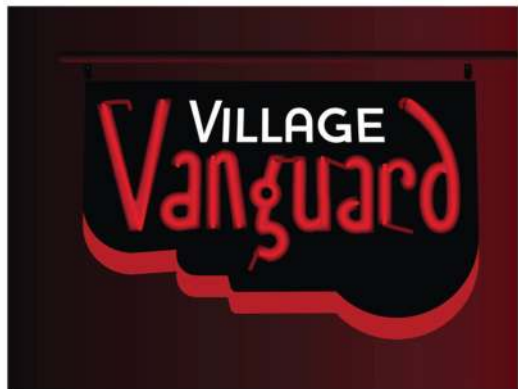
DXD

Digital eXtreme Definition

thad jones/ mel lewis orchestra all my yesterdays



thad jones/ mel lewis orchestra all my yesterdays



LEWIS BOWS THE JAZZ BAND AT VANGUARD

NEW YORK — The Jazz Band, a new group with some top jazz names, made its debut at the Village Vanguard Monday (7). The band was organized by drummer Mel Lewis, who began by recruiting Thad Jones, former Count Basie trumpeter.

Lewis, who works for ABC, crossed network lines to get trumpeter Jimmy Nottingham, trombonist Jack Rains, bass trombonist Cliff Hather and pianist Hank Jones, all from CBS, and trumpeter Snooky Young from NBC.

Bob Brookmeyer, trombonist, and Bill Berry, trumpeter, were recruited from the Merv Griffin TV band. The rest of the group includes Richard Davis, bass; Marv Holliday, baritone sax; Joe Farrell, tenor sax; Jimmy Owens, trumpet; Garnet Brown, trombone; Sam Herman, guitar, and Jerry Dodgion, Eddie Daniels and Jerome Richardson, reedmen.

Representatives from six record labels were on hand at the Monday opening. The group has been booked for three more Vanguard Mondays and is arranging a two-week booking this spring.

February 19, 1966, BILLBOARD



THE STORY OF THIS RECORDING OF THE THAD JONES/ MEL LEWIS ORCHESTRA

February 2016 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the first public performance of the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra, a band that set the standard for modern, innovative, swinging big band jazz: a standard that's been unmatched since. We're thrilled to share these recordings with the public to commemorate this historical landmark. These recordings capture the earliest lays of the Jones/Lewis orchestra. They were made by Resonance Records founder and president George Klabin when he was only 19 years old. The whole affair was unusually serendipitous: a historic ensemble as it emerged in the scene, full of energy and vibrancy recorded by George, a self-taught engineer, with his Crown 2-track tape machine and a simple portable mixing board.

When I began working at Resonance in 2009, George told me how, as a sophomore at Columbia University who was in charge of jazz at the college radio station, he got a call from radio personality Alan Grant, whom he'd just befriended. Grant asked George to come to the Vanguard and record the band. Grant said he needed demos to help him get a recording contract for the band. And the band eventually got a deal with Solid State Records and released several albums beginning later in 1966.

Let me be clear: these recordings are different from the Solid States in a major sense. *These came first.* These recordings capture the exuberance and joy of the musicians playing together for an audience for the first time and doing what they did best, both with their friends — their colleagues in the band — and among friends — colleagues who came out to hear the band. And all of them — the musicians, their friends and the regular audience — new they were experiencing something great.

When we started this project in 2009, all we had were the tapes and the idea, "Wouldn't it be great if we could release these recordings officially?" I say "officially" because some of this music was released illegally in 2000 as bootlegs. For the bootleg, no one was paid. Also, the packaging was sketchy and many of the musicians weren't even credited.

Fortunately, George had the complete set of tapes he'd made. Listening back to them, we discovered fantastic performances that had not been bootlegged and therefore, we had great, previously unheard material to present. The album is made up of the best takes culled from each of the band's two sets in both evenings: February 7, 1966, and March 21, 1966.

We're happy to be undertaking the first legitimate release of this material. Thad Jones's and Mel Lewis's families have officially embraced this release. Thanks to the families' attorney, Philip Kurnit, and Resonance General Counsel John Koenig for their months of negotiations, which resulted in agreements for this release. I also want to thank Jones/Lewis alumnus Jerry Dodgion and Don and Maureen Sickler for their efforts coordinating and connecting Resonance with many of the surviving members. Finally, and most importantly, I want to thank George Klabin for committing Resonance to pursuing this project with such dedication. George wanted Resonance to bring the music to the public with respect befitting the 50th anniversary of his groundbreaking band's first public performance. I hope you'll agree that his wish has been realized.

To annotate this album, we've assembled a cast of personalities who share their recollections and observations. All of them were there or have had something to do with the band. First, Resonance has brought on as an associate producer Chris Smith, a scholar, researcher, author and drummer. Chris is well versed in the history of the Jones/Lewis Orchestra. Chris's essay, the lead essay here, provides both historical facts and thoroughgoing analysis. And as a companion to this album, I recommend Chris's 2014 book, *The View From The Back Of The Band: The Life and Music of Mel Lewis*, published by University of North Texas Press. We've also included George Klabin's first-hand account of how it all came together.

We've been able to interview all the living band members from both nights: Garnett Brown, Eddie Daniels, Richard Davis, Jerry Dodgion, Marv "Doc" Holladay, Tom McIntosh and Jimmy Owens. And we've included a piece from the great pianist, arranger and Vanguard Jazz Orchestra alumn, Jim McNeely. And through Chris Smith, we've also located many reviews of opening night at the Vanguard. We've included them. Lastly, I'm happy to say that we have some wonderful photographs to help take us to 1966, thanks to our access to the archives of Jan Persson, Raymond Ross, Ray Avery and Chuck Stewart. Many thanks to Cynthia Sesso and Chuck and Kim Stewart for all their help.

I'd like to acknowledge our team who pulled this album together: John Koenig, who edited the album package, and also Zak Shelby-Szysko, Heidi Kotheim Kalison and Alex Carrillo who together transcribed all of the interviews and helped me coordinate the moving pieces.

So please, sit back and enjoy the music and book.

Zev Feldman, Los Angeles, October 2015

GEORGE KLABIN: BEING THERE — 50 YEARS AGO

I am a 19-year-old sophomore at Columbia University in Manhattan. I am head of the jazz department at WKCR-FM, the college radio station. I recently befriended a fellow jazz radio announcer, Alan Grant, who hosts a daily jazz show on WABC-FM in New York.

I have a good reputation as an amateur recording engineer willing to record jazz in the New York area and not charge the musicians if they allow me to broadcast the music — once — on my show. It's a good deal for everyone: I get original jazz that can only be heard if you tune in to my show and the musicians get a copy of the tape they can use as they please.

It's late 1965. Alan Grant calls to ask if I am willing to record a new big band formed by Thad Jones and Mel Lewis; they'll play on Monday, February 7, 1966 at the Village Vanguard in Greenwich Village. Alan says the tape will be used to find a record deal and that I can play it on my show. I'm happy to oblige!

I find out who is in the band and I am pretty excited. We have some of the absolutely greatest living modern jazz musicians in this band! On Monday afternoon, February 7, I am full of confidence (mixed with trepidation) as I enter the empty club with my meager assortment of equipment: 1 Ampex 50-pound Crown professional two-track stereo tape recorder; one huge four-input stereo mixer, 6 mics (Neumann U67, Beyer and AKG professional

mics and an Electro Voice 654 dynamic, which I always use for the bass inside the bridge); mic stands; one set of Beyer stereo headphones plus cables and connectors. That's it! No EQ, no reverb, not even pan pots (the mixer allows only left, center or right routing). I have been using this equipment for less than one year and I have not recorded a full 17-piece big band with it!

My presence must not disturb the business of the club. Normally, professional recordings are made with far more equipment, which is always placed in the back area near the kitchen, which also serves as a sort of green room for the musicians. I am given two tiny cocktail tables designed to seat two people. That's all the space they can spare me inside the main room. I'm all the way at the front near the stage on the elevated area where fans sit on one long upholstered banquette with those cocktail tables in front of them.

I set up my equipment and the band arrives in the early evening. I am shown where the musicians will be placed. It's really tight and somehow I have to place my six mics to catch the entire band. I decide to set one mic for each of the horn sections: bones, trumpets and saxes. One more for the bass, squeezed inside the bridge ensconced in a roll of foam. The fifth one for the piano and the sixth for Thad, who will be facing the band and conducting, but also playing solos. There is no mic left for drums, but I figure Mel will be picked up by the nearby mics.

By the time the entire band arrives, they are starting to seat the audience. There's no time for a sound check! I will have to get my sound balance and make sure all the mics work during the performance! It's really going to take supreme concentration and skill to get the sound right, given that all balance, stereo separation and cleanliness of the sound is being done in the moment with no chance to change any parameter later, such as would be possible if multiple tracks were recorded to be mixed and processed later.

All the musicians are very cooperative. All pros with extensive recording studio experience, they want this recording to sound as good as possible. This whole all-star band is made of individual soloists! Take the sax section: Jerry Dodgion, Joe Farrell, Jerome Richardson, Eddie Daniels. They will all solo on various tunes and to be heard above the orchestra, they must play closely into the one sax mic, which may have to be moved a bit to accommodate them. I cannot do that as I am too far away and cannot be running around during the performance. So they will have to help, and they do, by moving the mic carefully. Same for the trumpet and trombones. The end result: it works amazingly well! A few solos are not properly on mic, but overall, the majority of the music is remarkably balanced!

So I am sitting there in this little area, headphones on, having to catch solos and raise the volume on that mic and then bring it back down at the end. I do not have linear faders; it's all round knobs for the volume of each mic. I have never heard these arrangements, or even most of the tunes, since they are originals by Thad with only a sprinkling of standards.

Out of the two sets that night, I am able to correctly balance and capture about 75% of the tunes. Some of them are done twice (there are two sets).

As I sit there dealing with all this, I am listening to something amazing! I have heard plenty of big bands, but I never heard anyone write for big band the way Thad Jones is doing it! He is using the band as a fluid unit of musicians, switching between ensembles of different sizes. A trio or quartet, becomes

larger, then traditional big band sections or accents, then when the soloist plays, it can sound like a small group again. And the chords! Tightly spaced, modern but harmonically very satisfying. Great melodies, superb solos and lots of interplay. Thad loves to let a few guys play at the same time, freely, against the whole band. It's exciting, wild, reminds me of George Russell but more mainstream, in the best sense.

There is a palpable crackling energy in the room! This is the first time they have played this innovative stuff in public! Thad is the cheerleader, conducting, waving, shouting, clapping. You can hear it throughout the recordings. It's really special! I am caught up in it all, and the culmination is "The Little Pixie." This tune puts it all together for me! The band can swing as hard as anything I have ever heard. The solos are brilliant; the interplay — and the passion — is there. This is big band music like never before...

When it's all done, I pack up, take the stuff home and make copies for Alan Grant. He calls me back soon after to thank me. He asks would I be willing to record again on March 21st? They need more material; they think they can do it better with a few weeks of Monday nights to hone it.

I am happy to accommodate. This time, I get hold of four more mics and an additional Ampex mixer, so now I have 10 mics, with the luxury of two mics for each horn section and one for the drums! Other than that, it's the same constant challenge — to get it right in real time on two tracks — but at least I have heard the arrangements and know where the solos start.

The music is amazing. Check out Joe Farrell's solo on "Lover Man," to this day, 50 years later, one of the greatest tenor solos I have ever heard. Or Eddie Daniels on "Mornin' Reverend," or Jerome Richardson and Jimmy Nottingham on "Big Dipper."

This is music that changed the way big bands played jazz like Scott LaFaro changed jazz bass or Bill Evans changed piano. And ever since then, fifty years ago, the influence of Thad Jones and this band lives on. Looking back, it was a wonderful privilege to be there, and it changed my life.

My sincere recommendation — to get the most out of the listening experience — is to put on a pair of good stereo headphones and immerse yourself in the atmosphere of those two nights. You will hear all the subtleties: Thad's shouts, the room sound, the musicians' camaraderie, encouraging each other and most of all, the pure joy! Now you can be there, too.

George Klabin, founder of Resonance Records, February 2016

CHRIS SMITH: THE BEGINNINGS OF THE THAD JONES/ MEL LEWIS ORCHESTRA

Between January and May 1966, three bands that changed the archetype of jazz made Village Vanguard debuts. These included the revised small groups of Miles Davis and John Coltrane and an unexpected big band led by Thad Jones and Mel Lewis.

Miles Davis's revised aggregation, sometimes referred to as the Second Great Quintet, played the Vanguard in January of 1966. The front line of

Miles Davis and Wayne Shorter mixed with the propulsive rhythm section of Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter and Tony Williams and changed the expectation of how contemporary small groups perform. John Coltrane's quest for spirituality and freedom also led him to reshape his group. When Coltrane played the Vanguard in May of 1966, both McCoy Tyner and Elvin Jones had moved on and were replaced by Alice Coltrane and Rashied Ali. The Vanguard debut of Coltrane's new band proved to be the strongest influence to the Free Jazz movement.

During this period of small group innovation, Thad Jones and Mel Lewis made an equally important statement and debuted their big band at the Vanguard on Monday, February 7, 1966. The Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra was such a huge success on opening night, even Thad and Mel were surprised by the reception. John S. Wilson wrote a glowing notice for the *New York Times* and the band was soon booked to play the Vanguard every Monday. For the next 13 years the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra kept the big band tradition alive and, indeed, added an innovative and influential chapter to it.

While magazines, critics and history books have rightfully lauded Miles and Coltrane's groups, these same sources often fail to mention the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra. The official release of these recordings by Resonance Records comes at an opportune moment. Let these recordings inspire discussion and recognition of the band's contributions. It's time to listen back to the genesis of the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra, commemorate their 50th anniversary and recognize them as one of the most important groups in jazz. Put on this music, tap your foot, clap your hands and celebrate Thad Jones, Mel Lewis and the Band.

Thad Jones

Thad Jones was a revolutionary conductor of jazz. Like a painter selecting colors from his palette, he used hand signals to select soloists, signal members of the rhythm section to drop out, control dynamics, change tempos, repeat sections, cue a written insert or select an individual to improvise a background. Thad explained his conducting style to Les Tompkins: "My technique of reshaping things on the stand, by hand signals and such, this represents the way I've always felt that music should be played. I don't think it should ever be confined to any one particular area, one straight and narrow road. No road is ever engineered that perfectly." Thad's conducting was constantly developing his written music, even during the band's first performance. Many of the musical aspects that make these recordings so exciting were a result of his impetuous conducting.

Thad's mastery of improvisation cannot be left out of this discussion. In an interview with Marc Meyers, trombonist Benny Powell spoke of Thad: "Thad Jones was about sophistication and sanctification." Powell's statement is the perfect description of Thad's writing and playing. He was equally comfortable growing on a blues or playing complex intervallic lines. Thad had complete control of his horn and was never at a loss for rhythmic or harmonic ideas. His creativity seemed to flow no-end. Even when Thad was on the road and soloed on the same song night after night, he brought fresh ideas to bear in each performance. Thad's inspired playing had a positive



Thad Jones. ©Jan Persson/CIT Images

effect on every band he worked with, especially his own. Jerry Dodgion recalled, "He was such a great improviser and everyone in the band listened so closely when he played. When the band came in and played after one of his solos, it sounded *really good!*"

Thad Jones is best remembered for his compositions and arrangements. The sophistication of his writing is never completely absorbed on first listen — or hundredth, for that matter. It takes mature ears and repetition to process Thad's unusual inner voices, unexpected rhythms and crunchy harmonies. What most people don't realize is that he wrote much of his music away from the piano. Thad often wrote on an airplane or band bus with nothing but a pencil and staff paper. Simply, he heard things in his head that our ears and brains are still trying to process 50 years later. That is an undeniable mark of genius and one that should be consistently mentioned among the ranks of other 20th century composers such as Ellington, Strayhorn and Gershwin.

Hundreds of musicians perform Thad's music each year, as it still sounds as innovative and contemporary as any. While the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra honors Thad at the highest level, high school and college musicians throughout the world are also busy performing his music. With every student who learns "Big Dipper" or "Mean What You Say," the world gains a citizen who has learned about jazz in a big band and experienced the joy of swing. What a lasting gift Thad has left us. Thanks to the continued performance of his music, especially by young musicians, Thad Jones's legacy is growing stronger with each passing year.

Mel Lewis

Mel Lewis developed his drumming style in the bands of Stan Kenton, Terry Gibbs and Bill Holman. When Mel took to the stage of the Vanguard in February of 1966, he was already considered one of the best drummers of his era. However, it was through his work with Thad that Mel finally became recognized as one of the greatest drummers of all time. Mel's playing in the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra remains the benchmark for big band drumming.

At the time of these recordings, Mel had played the charts only a handful of times, yet his support of the band was nearly flawless. His playing was strong but not loud, dense but not busy, energetic but not rushed. He gave the music exactly what it needed. These recordings showcase his ability to hear every part of the band and use that awareness to interject with subtlety the perfect rhythm on the perfect instrument at the perfect time. This was Mel's personal style of big band drumming — a highly musical, interactive and swinging style that sounded as thoughtful as the composer's written notes. Trumpeter Marvin Stamm summed up Mel's drumming perfectly:

The thing that was so amazing about Mel was that he heard everything that was going on in the band. Depending on which section had the lead, whether it was a sax soli, a trombone soli, or the trumpets were leading the ensemble through the out chorus, Mel knew every part. He would also accentuate things that other drummers would never hear. Mel never made the drums a prominent instrument in the band. His sound was always something that the band sat on top of and he was the most supportive drummer that I have ever heard. For me, I have never heard anyone be so giving musically, as part of a big band. I don't think he ever thought of himself as a drummer, I think he probably thought of himself as just a band member. But as it ended up, he was the band!

Mel supported the band while he simultaneously followed Thad's conducting. The two had a constant nonverbal dialog during live performances. The connection between them was so strong that a simple look or gesture could take the band in an entirely new direction. When asked to describe Mel's respect for Thad, Jerry Dodgion emphatically stated, "Mel was in Thad's corner all the way. As far as tempo goes, Mel wouldn't change a tempo for God, but if Thad said, 'Let's pick it up a little right here,' he'd do it!" The two men worked together to develop an environment of creativity and freedom within the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra. The never-before-released version of "Back Bone" presented here is a prime example. You can hear and feel the enthusiasm that traveled throughout the band and audience. Even when the written music ran out the band's enthusiasm and creativity did not stop. Dig the tip of hat to Count Basie at the end. It seemed that no one knew exactly what could happen from moment to moment. The only given was that with Thad and Mel at the helm, whatever happened was going to be swinging and joyous.

And The Band!

"And The Band" - was the phrase Thad used to acknowledge his fellow musicians and close each set. His exuberant statement was immediately



followed by Mel's signature drum fill. While seemingly small, these two things excited the audience and directed the final applause to the band as a whole. Thad and Mel loved and respected their band members and realized the importance that each individual had on the music.

The lineup of musicians on these recordings was Mel and Thad's dream band. It was an amazing cast led by experienced pros such as Bob Brookmeyer, Snooky Young, Pepper Adams, Richard Davis, Hank Jones, Jerry Dodgion, Cliff Heather, Jimmy Nottingham, Marv "Doc" Holladay, Jack Rains, Bill Berry and Jerome Richardson. Added to that were some of New York's finest young musicians in Jimmy Owens, Joe Farrell, Garnett Brown, Danny Stiles and Eddie Daniels. Thad and Mel created a superb musical group and in the process made an important social statement. The band was a diverse mix of white, black, young, old, Christian and Jew. This was a vast departure from most big bands throughout history and especially revolutionary during the social turbulence of the mid-1960s.

All the band members brought unique musical strengths thanks to their varied backgrounds. It was this assemblage of diverse musical strengths that allowed Thad's music to reach its highest level. When it was time to play bluesy and greasy, the band did it. When it was time to play intricate ensemble passages, the band did it. When thrown a hand signal to improvise solo backgrounds, the band did it. Like Thad, the band could go from sophistication to sanctification in a blink of the eye. It was through this flexibility that the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra did for big bands what Miles Davis's Second Great Quintet did for small groups. They brought a contemporary

energy and freedom to the music that forever changed how big band jazz is composed and performed.

Enjoy listening to these recordings and reliving history. It is some of the greatest music ever made!

Chris Smith September 17, 2015

JOHN MOSCA: WHAT THE THAD JONES/MEL LEWIS ORCHESTRA MEANS TO ME

I can still remember it clearly — the phone call I got from Mel Lewis back at my parents' place on Long Island. It was an old dial phone, one of those big black ones you could hammer nails with, the only one in the house. Mel was calling to see if I was interested in joining the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra for six weeks. We'd tour across country for a week, then fly to Japan for about a month and finally, work our way back to New York for another week. Oh, and we were leaving in three days. I thought then that it was the call of a lifetime. Forty years later I still do.

I stammered out something about how much I loved the band — and his playing especially — and I accepted without asking what it paid or caring if it paid anything. Of course years later, I realized how stuck they must have been for someone to come out on short notice who had never played with the band. Luckily I had recommendations from lead trumpeter Al Porcino and bass trombonist Dave Taylor, both of whom I had played with in the many rehearsal bands that were going all day at Charles Colin's studio on West 53rd Street; that would have to be enough. The band left on the bus for the first stop while I stayed back and ran around with the road manager to get my visa. Then I flew out to meet them and play my first gig with them in Columbus, Ohio.

For us trombone players, I suppose the big band form is in our DNA to one degree or another. Growing up on Long Island, we played stock arrangements and were impressed by the virtuosity in the bands of Stan Kenton, Maynard Ferguson and Buddy Rich. At the same time, the small group recordings of J. J. Johnson and Bob Brookmeyer were so strong on an individual level that a double life seemed to be inevitable.

When Thad and Mel set up shop at the Vanguard in '66, word got out instantly that this was a singular experience not to be missed. New York was beginning the dangerous decay that would continue for twenty years, so most responsible parents forbade teenage excursions to the city — Greenwich Village no less — that began at 10:00 PM. My dad, when faced with the question about where your children are at ten o'clock, was not about to say, "I don't know. Downtown at a club somewhere." So we did what teenagers had been doing and will do forever, we lied. Hatching a scheme about rehearsing at each other's house, my friends and I piled into a car that couldn't pass inspection in Pakistan with someone at the wheel who drove like a bootlegger and headed for town. After waiting on a line that went all the way up 7th Avenue to 11th street, we were admitted for

\$4.00 a head, with a 50 cent discount if you had a union card. And no questions about our age. Thanks, Max! We didn't push it and stuck to soft drinks — all except the driver, that is.

When the band started at around 10:20, we, like the rest of the sold-out crowd, were transfixed. The music was new, but not. It was so grounded and it proceeded so logically that it seemed as if this was what a big band was always supposed to be. Of course, you didn't notice Mel right away. I think the first tune that night was "Quietude." I didn't even know what a flugelhorn was at that point. Thad's sound was so pure over the saxes and Roland Hanna, so original and unbound, that it was easy to forget there were 12 other guys on that tiny bandstand. The out chorus would change all that when Mel put the whole thing in his pocket with one of those bass drum hits that lifted the whole club without disturbing the phrase.

The rest of the night kept up at the same level and more. Thad and Brookmeyer on Bob's chart of "Willow Weep for Me" showing twice as much compositional genius than any band had a right to. Pepper Adams's ferocious, singular concept on "Once Around." And more, and more, until the night ended with "Don't Get Sassy" and Snooky Young carried the band out. We were wrung-out, but excited. This was truly something for us to aspire to — not that we could even think of being part of something like it — but an inkling of what was possible, when it was right, was a big thing.

Fast forward past my lucky break to right now: I'm sitting on a plane helping to bring the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, as we're now known, to Japan for our sixth annual engagement after a thirty year gap. There have been lots of ups and downs, as one would expect. First losing Thad and then Mel and choosing both times, with the steadfast support of Max and Lorraine Gordon, to continue. And now we have Lorraine and daughter Deborah helping us fire up every week. Winning a Grammy and then losing our best friend and mentor Bob Brookmeyer. It's a mixed bag, like every life.

The music endures: the charts from the very beginning right through to the great work from Jim McNeely. And musicians arrive with talent and the passion to play it, inspiring audiences, future players and each other. We're very happy to have this recording of the first night. Everyone needs to know where they came from. Come down and let us know how we're doing. It's still the best place I can think of to be on a Monday night.

John Mosca

Somewhere over the Pacific, November 1, 2015

JIM McNEELY, PIANIST, ARRANGER AND LEADER OF THE VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA, ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF THE THAD JONES/MEL LEWIS ORCHESTRA

Chris Smith: When did your musical relationship with Thad and Mel begin?

Jim McNeely: It began officially after a year or two after I came to New York in '75. I was sitting at home on a Saturday and I got a call from Rufus Reid. I had gotten to know Rufus in the early '70s out in the Chicago area. Subsequently, he moved out to the East Coast and he was playing bass with Thad and Mel. He was playing a gig that weekend down the Jersey Shore; it was with a singer and Mel was playing drums. And someone was playing guitar and he was having some big personal problems. They had played Friday night and it just wasn't working out and they thought, "We gotta get someone who can play the gig." So Rufus called me and said, "Hey, are you available tonight to play this gig? You can come to my house and we'll drive down together with Mel." I said, "Yeah, sure!" So that was the first time I played with Mel. He was playing just this small drum set in this club. You know it's funny, I've lived in New Jersey now for almost 30 years and I still have no idea where this place was. Back in those days, all I knew was I was in Jersey. So we played the gig and drove back to Rufus's house and then Mel gave me a ride home. And that was my first insight into how much Mel could talk 'cause he started talking as soon as we got in the car and he didn't stop talking until I got out at the subway and went back to Queens. So that's the first time I played with Mel.

With Thad, I didn't really play with him — didn't really meet him — until the second time I subbed with the band. The first time I got called to sub with the band, it was Harold Danko who called me and I said, "Yeah, sure, of course, I'd love to sub with the band." And Thad wasn't there that night. I remember Mel was there and Jerry Dodgion spoke on the mike; he emceed the gig that night. Second time Harold called me, Thad was there and that's the first time I played with him and the first time I really met him. That's basically how that happened. In those days, it's kind of the same as it is now: the call came to sub in the band and you said yes and you just jumped in. I knew a lot of the music 'cause I'd been listening to Thad and Mel's records ever since they had started. So I felt like I knew a lot of the music.

Had you composed much yourself? Had you done any big band charts by the time you first played with the band?

I had, off and on. I'd started writing big band music when I was a sophomore in high school. I never really studied it. I'd read a book — the biggest arranging book at the time was by a guy called Russ Garcia — and I read that and got this idea that I could write a chart. And luckily I had a big band director when I was in high school who was really into Count Basie and swinging. And he encouraged me to write. I wrote maybe one or two things a year. I got into college and I was a composition major and I wrote a few big band things, but I realized some years later that back then I didn't really know much what I was doing. I was just kind of stabbing in the dark.



Thad Jones. © Ray Avery/CTSIIMAGES

In college I had played some of Thad's arrangements. By the time we got into the early '70s, I think that's when Kendor¹ started to publish some of his music and I started to play some of those charts and I got a feel for a couple of things I thought were really important in Thad's writing. First of all, there was this tension, this strong harmonic tension, from the very chromatic kind of language he was using and that was combined with the fact that it swung so hard. And he had a handle on the fact that, if the harmony was really chromatic, but it was swinging, people would dig it. Because feeling good with the rhythm was the most important thing. So he had a handle on that like almost nobody else. And this dense, chromatic language... I didn't really understand it at the time. But there was something about the music that just swung like crazy and I loved it.

And another thing that I started to hear was I think Thad picked this up from his years with the Basie band. There are a lot of piano solos in the Thad and Mel repertoire because, first of all, he had guys like Hank Jones and Roland Hanna to write for. But structurally a piano solo had a real important place in the arrangement. It wasn't just a chance for the piano player to blow. It had a strong structural function in the course of the arrangement. You know, like in Basie's band. Basie would play an intro or he'd play a little connecting thing. Every solo Basie played had a function in the arrangement. That's what Thad did too. And also, the angularity of his lines. I knew about Thad as an improviser for some years; what killed me about his writing was that he brought that angularity not only to the saxophone lines, but to the brass writing. He would always emphasize the more dissonant notes and that

really spoke to me, the way he did that.

So in the early days, I didn't really analyze what he had done, but there was something about his music that just really got under my skin.

What made it different to you than the other bands you were hearing? You listened to a lot of Ellington, Basie, Woody Herman, all those great bands. Obviously everything you just mentioned was different. What else jumped out at you that made it feel contemporary?

Contemporary is exactly the word I was going to use because this is the late '50s and look, when I'm stretched out in the funeral home somewhere, I want Count Basie playing on the stereo. That to me still is the be-all and end-all of big band music. Ellington was incredible and Woody Herman and everybody else was great. And Dizzy's big band — I used to love Dizzy's writing and just the whole attitude his big band had. But the solo language of the Basie band was kind of late swing or with a certain younger player who might be in the Basie band in the later era, like Frank Foster, it was kind of bebop or late bebop. The thing that killed me about Thad's writing is that it reflected the music that was going on more in the day; in the mid-'60s. You know, Coltrane and say, Art Blakey's group and the more modal things they were doing — the kind of energy they were bringing to the table.

One of the things that killed me was that at first it sounded like the music that was going on in the mid '60s in jazz. Very kind of modal and high energy. I think it might have been Joe Farrell playing the tenor. But Thad's music, just like Dizzy's big band, reflected the bebop era that he came up in, and the other bands reflected the era that the leaders came up in originally. Thad — his band, his writing — reflected the stuff he was doing, especially in the '60s. That's another thing that really got me about that band.

And another thing was Thad himself. He'd play. He'd play a solo and it was unmistakably Thad Jones. Here's a guy who had started out building a career as a small-group guy playing a lot of quintet records, but even then, his tunes were always very interesting, as were some of the arrangements of other tunes that he would do. They always had a very interesting character about them. But then he went with Basie and started to get a reputation as a writer. But then, with his band, his own soloing was a very important part of the whole thing, too. One of the things I used to enjoy when I'd play with him in the big band, was just hearing him play.

I remember Jerry Dodgion saying that to me as well when I talked to him. He would always say that the band always sounded the best right after Thad's solo.

Yeah.

I've always had this vision in my head of Thad doing exactly what you said and at the same time, I have a notion that the magic was that the music in Thad's head and the feel he felt for the music magically aligned with the way Mel thought and felt about the music. It's like having a great pitcher and a catcher. Their conceptions of music fit. So that Thad wrote thinking about Mel. But at the same

time, he could write whatever he wanted and Mel could play how he played and it was this perfect relationship. Would you agree?

I agree with that wholeheartedly. A big factor in the way Thad's arrangements sounded was the fact that Mel was playing them. Not only his time feel, but also his cymbal sounds and just the way he tuned his drums and everything. Mel was a huge part of that. I remember, even when I first came to New York and we'd go down to the Vanguard. We'd all say, "Let's go hear Thad's band." Well the more I learned about the band, especially after playing with the band, I realized it really was Thad Jones/Mel Lewis. They really were co-leaders. Unfortunately sometimes Mel got a little overshadowed by the fact that Thad was up there conducting and Thad was doing the bulk of the writing. So it was kind of natural for a lot of people to think, "Oh, it's just Thad's band." But Mel was such a huge part of the overall feel of the band and just the way that music sounded.

Can you think of any specific aspects of Thad's writing that have influenced your own writing.

Yeah, I think first and foremost, the harmonic language, which I got a lot of insight into after I started playing with the band. Sometimes I'd hear a voicing and I'd try playing it with the band and it wouldn't sound right. Then all of a sudden, on some night, I'd try a different voicing. And when you played a voicing that matched what the band was playing, it was like the piano keys all lit up or something that happened like that. Then I really thought, "Aah! That's what that is!" The next step was, "That's what that is, but why did he do that? What is it about that voicing that makes it work?" And so I learned a lot just by sitting there and trying to figure out stuff as it went by, you know, while playing his music.

Then a really big, huge leap for me was, after Thad left the band, and Mel hired a French horn player. And he had Kendor send a bunch of scores to me "cause I had to write French horn parts for . . . Stephanie Fauber was her name. And so instead of saying, "Oh, well I think Thad's doing this or he might be doing that," I finally had to really look at the scores and learn what he was doing. And that was a huge leap for me. This was before *Inside the Score?* had been published. So I had to really look at the score and figure out what he was doing. That was probably the greatest arranging lesson I ever had in my life — just to look at those scores and to try to write a French horn part in the middle of all that brass writing. Another thing that influenced me was melodic writing. Like I said before, in his playing he tended to emphasize the more dissonant notes. That really influenced me. And also, rhythmically there are certain things that he did that I know — not that I ever consciously tried to imitate him — but I'll hear things that I've written and I'll realize, "Oh I really kind of got that from Thad."

Another big thing was the way that he wrote for the bass. He was very meticulous about notating the bass part under the ensemble. That was a big eye opener to me — how meticulous he was about notating the bass part. And it really had to happen that way because of all the harmonic stuff he was doing. He needed the support of the bass to make the whole thing sound right.

Oh, and another thing I began to realize with three or four of his arrangements — his arrangement of his brother Hank's "Ah, That's Freedom" and Thad's own tune, "61st and Richard" and a couple other shout choruses. The audiences would applaud after a shout chorus, as if it was a solo. Like on "Ah, That's Freedom" [SINGS] Da-da-du-ow. First of all, it builds through two choruses, it just builds and builds. And then the big shout chorus happens. And to this day, when the band plays that chart, the band finishes the shout chorus and the audience applauds. And I thought, someday I want to write a shout chorus where it gets that kind of a response. There's a chart I wrote for the Vanguard band on the *Lickety Split* record called "Thad." And it's got a long buildup and a shout chorus. And the times we've played it, maybe half the time, the audience applauds at the end of it. So I figured, I met Thad half-way on that. I get them some of the time, but he could get them every single time; the audience would burst into applause 'cause it was so powerful and swinging so hard. It's unbelievable.

Do you feel that Thad is underappreciated in the jazz community, these days, and if you do, do you have any explanation to maybe why?

I think he is a little underappreciated, yeah. I'm not going to say that nobody knows who he is. But number one, I think some other bands that started in the swing era and then, by the time they got to the '50s and '60s, they had built-in audiences. The listening audience for Thad and Mel was more of a hard-core jazz listening audience. And the band didn't go on the road all the time. It wasn't like Ellington or Basie. They would do a tour here or there. And finally when they got to the point where they had won a Grammy Award and they were starting to do more touring, that's when Thad had decided to leave and move to Copenhagen. And so I think he just wasn't out there as much, performing with his own band in the U.S. as much as some people were. So I think among the jazz audience he's underappreciated. Arrangers and composers, of course . . . I mean, I still idolize the guy. And jazz musicians really have a strong appreciation for him. I personally would like to see him get more attention from some of the big repertory groups, that are still around. Certainly Jazz at Lincoln Center. I think they did a thing that was dedicated to Thad's music a few years ago. And the Vanguard band is kind of the band of record in playing his music.

I was thinking about something Dick Oatts talked to me about regarding the band when they started in '66. Dick suggested that in that band, a majority of the players were seasoned professionals, but not all. You had Joe Farrell and Jerry Dodgion and you had Eddie Daniels. They were all young then. And you had Jimmy Owens. You had some very young musicians in there, but it was a mixed-aged, mixed-race band. And in '66 that was certainly a very powerful thing. Thad and Mel's band — and this aspect of it — isn't prominent in the jazz history books with the fusion talk and the free-jazz. This band was really breaking the racial barriers that seemed to be in place at the time.

That's part of it and the mix was a conscious effort on their part. They kind of made a policy that they wanted it to be that way. You know in those

days, of course there were exceptions, but even in the '60s, there were still the black bands and the white bands. And the occasional black musician who would play with Woody Herman or somebody; or there would be the occasional white musician who would play with Duke Ellington or Basie. Thad and Mel, they made a conscious effort not to be that way. To me, that's a very important part of their whole legacy. The other important part of their legacy is, you know you look at the Village Vanguard and a lot of clubs on Monday night were dark. It started this tradition: the Monday night big band thing. And one reason that worked was they were able to draw on players who the rest of the week were either playing Broadway shows or studio work and they could play on Monday night. And it was I think not only the racial and the age mix, but the fact is, whether they were seasoned pros or not, these weren't guys who would just go with a band and sit on the bus for 40 weeks out of the year. They had careers in New York, they had careers with other musicians. I remember hearing Joe Farrell with Elvin Jones's trio with Jimmy Garrison. And you'd hear, of course, a guy like Bob Brookmeyer had a completely parallel universe going on of his own. And so it was players who brought their own professional life to the band; it wasn't just guys who were only in the band and that's all they did. They brought a richness and a maturity, even if they were younger. The other side of that is it made it hard for Thad and Mel to travel. Frankly, the only reason I got in the band — and it was the same for Douglas Purviance — was that they had a 12-week tour of Europe coming up and Harold Danko, the piano player at the time, said, "I just can't leave New York for 12 weeks. I've got too much going on." So when I joined the band, the age level of the band kind of dropped because some of the few remaining older players left and were replaced by a younger crowd.

Zev Feldman: Is there anything else you'd like to say about Thad and Mel and the legacy of the orchestra and how it's continued over the years? Any final thoughts before closing?

Yeah, first of all, the first time I played with Thad — that was when I subbed — there's an arrangement that Jerry Dodgion did of "Body and Soul." It's just half a chorus. The rhythm section starts, then Thad or whoever was appointed, would play a solo on "Body and Soul" for a while. And then all of a sudden, the band would come in at the bridge and then take it out. It's just 16 bars with a tag — that's the whole written part. It's a very elegant arrangement. And so the first time I played it with Thad, I played my little intro and, of course, did the standard key, so the first chord is E-flat minor. And the first note Thad plays is a G natural, which to anyone who knows a little bit about music theory would think is probably the most "wrong" note you could play. And for about a split second, my mind raced through this thing. First of all I was thinking, "Gee, doesn't Thad know the correct changes to 'Body and Soul'?" And all of a sudden I said, "Wait a minute, he knows exactly what he's doing and what am I going to do with this note?" This was his little challenge to me: "OK, kid. Do something with it." I found a little voicing that worked and I think that might have played a part as to why I got the gig. But just playing with him and hearing his musical language — the way he both wrote and improvised — was so inspiring. And also seeing him conduct — the way he would bring the music to life. Seeing him

conduct was really something. He had a way of conducting where he was just fun to watch. He was animated, but at the same time it wasn't show-boating. He was addressing the music with his body and facial language. It was really something to see.

And then with Mel, his time feel and the way he was, in a sense, the perfect drummer for Thad's music at that time. That still stays with me. And I think another strong lesson to be learned from these two guys is that they both had careers going. They gave up a certain amount of stuff to put this band together. Thad had been with Basie and he was doing some other writing and he gave some of that up to start this band. And so did Mel. They put their heart and soul into it. And I think they've had a tremendous effect on . . . certainly composers and arrangers of my generation and even after us. They created a musical atmosphere. That, to me, is the most important thing. We still try to recreate that on Monday nights at the Vanguard — a musical atmosphere that these guys created. Jerry Dodgion has said several times that on a Monday night, the Vanguard was the best place to be in New York. And he's absolutely right and that was because of these two guys and what they did: who they brought into the band and the music they wrote, the way that they played it and the spirit they put into this thing. And that's to me the big legacy and what I try to remember every time. When I'm writing arrangements, there are still times when I think, "What would Thad do now?" He's still an inspiration and always will be. I just hope their legacy will be appreciated by more people.

Cheers to that.

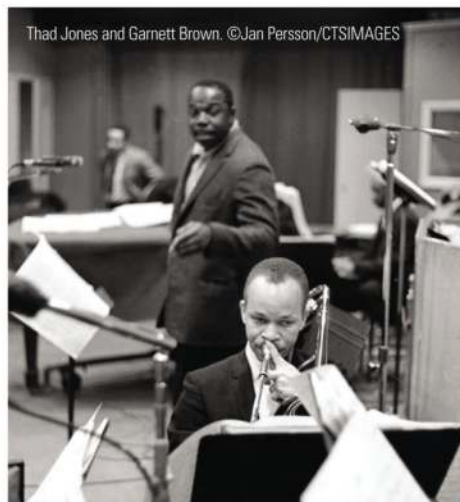
I look forward to the release. I think it's going to be really valuable.

- 1 A publisher of educational music for jazz ensembles.
- 2 A book by Rayburn Wright analyzing arrangements by Thad Jones, Sammy Nestico and Bob Brookmeyer.

GARNETT BROWN SPEAKS WITH ZEV FELDMAN

Zev Feldman: How did you come to be in the band? Who hired you and why do you think they chose you?

Garnett Brown: Well, I've got one up on you, because that was the first thing I thought would be asked. Back in 1964-'65, I had been asked to rehearse with George Russell. I don't know if you remember George Russell, but he's one of the most phenomenal people of our generation. So I made the rehearsal and everything, and I asked him "How did that happen?" And he said "Well, David Baker [noted composer and professor at Indiana University, who was formerly an accomplished jazz trombonist] cracked his jaw in some kind of way, and he just wasn't playing [trombone] anymore." So I did that rehearsal with George Russell in David Baker's place. And it turned out George Russell was preparing to take a band to Europe with George Wein for about a month. I think we were going to travel for about two weeks and then hang in Denmark and Sweden. So we did that. And some of the people who were in George Russell's band at that time were Thad and me and Joe Farrell. Anyway, we had a wonderful time playing together. And after that



Thad Jones and Garnett Brown. ©Jan Persson/CTS IMAGES

tour, when we came back to New York, that's when the call came. I think it was Mel who called. And I said, "Well, of course!" That was my road into that fantastic organization.

What do you remember about the band's first rehearsals? I've read they'd taken place as early as November. Did you have any feeling that the band was going to be successful at that time?

Well, that wasn't a question for me. Because when we stepped in there and saw that music, it was all on us. It was for us to make it come alive. So no, I don't think there was ever any kind of thing like that. The fun came out of actually going in there playing with Jerome throwing jokes around, and Jimmy Nottingham doing his "talking" through his trumpet, and sometimes when he would nod, Jerome Richardson would say to him, "Hey! Your service is calling you!" And he was about to run out and get the telephone to see if he had two or three more gigs coming.

It was really heavy in those days. There was a lot of work going on. I was very fortunate personally, because I came there kind of cold turkey. (Well, I did play with Chico Hamilton; I was with him for a minute and we played there and I decided I wanted to stay there in New York.) So getting in with Thad and the rest of the guys through the George Russell connection was great for me. It was just fun in the band. We had fun in between all that seriousness. Seriousness in terms of making music out of that paper. So to me that's about it as far as I could tell you, complete joy all the time.

What were your first impressions of Thad's new compositions — the newer music he was introducing?

They were very interesting. First of all, I was kind of chuckling at seeing the names that were written on everybody's parts for the Count Basie band; that's who that music was originally for. Count wanted to hear some of Thad's stuff to see if he would want to record it, I guess, if he liked it. Count was still like a four-four man: I gotta have it Uh-Uh-Uh-Uh. Anyway I kept looking at all these names and I saw a trombone player's name on it and I thought, "Hmm, I wonder why his name is on that?" And then the word kind of popped out: like Count wasn't really knocked out about it. And I'm sure Thad just raked all his stuff back up and kept it until he had a chance to use it. Well, he was already ready to use it with us because he had written all of it already.

These tunes and arrangements were different, right?

Indeed they were. And I think that's one reason why Count didn't accept it. He wasn't really into the big groove thing. This was a different groove that Thad had. He also had such a fantastic mind in terms of his melodies and counter-melodies that just took over. And as you probably know, you never heard a band like that until you heard that one. So we all felt very privileged about it. I was happy to be there. And seeing all those guys in there, I'd say "Wow! That's fantastic!" And by that time, I kind of knew just about everybody. I hadn't been in New York that long. After I left Chick Hamilton, I was recommended to George Russell. And that led to the European tour where I met Thad and Joe Farrell. And that led to this.

What were your first impressions of Mel as a drummer in the band?

First, Mel could read his brains out. And he knew how to accompany sections. And when the stuff was ready to explode he did that. I was listening to this thing and Sam Herman, the guitar player with us, had these different shakers and things. And I said, "My goodness!" I don't quite remember all of that being in the rhythm section. But it was there. I guess we were so engrossed in having such a good time with all the wonderful stuff that was playing at the time. But it was so hip, and they made the changes between the rhythm section as to what they were going to be doing in terms of their playing work; their contribution to making some significant stuff happen rhythmically was wonderful.

Mel was one of the most astute and forward-looking persons in a rhythm section that I've heard. Especially in a big band. He was such a sight-reader that he could go down the chart looking at everything and then when we started playing, he was probably the only one who got everything perfect. And his grooves were really, really cool. I wondered about it and said "Man, Richard Davis and Mel Lewis?" And then Richard, of course, was just absolutely, he's really one of those guys . . . First of all, he had this tremendous education in classical music, and when he was in Chicago, those big conductors — Stravinsky . . . That was about the size of it in terms of them really locked up with each other. And you wouldn't think it, because we all knew Richard Davis. We all knew him as a guy who was not just going to stand there and play BOOM, BOOM, BOOM, BOOM, BOOM, BOOM, BOOM, BOOM [SINGS A WALKING BASS LINE]. That's not all he's gonna be doing. He's gonna come up with stuff that will absolutely floor you. His thing is just

outstanding. And we were so happy that it all worked. But Thad must have known what he was doing.

What do you remember about February 7, 1966, which was the opening night?

When we made those rehearsals, we knew we were ready to go into the Vanguard and do the thing. That wasn't ever a problem. I don't think we would have ever done it if we didn't feel secure at that point. And I think Thad and Mel and the Vanguard folks, they got to a point where they thought we were ready and we went on in that night. And when I heard the recording of "Back Bone," it hit me: that was the first thing we played. I could not believe it, I said, "Wait a minute! I'm sitting there having a good time all over again because I had forgotten." It really was just outstanding. That was Jerry Dodgion playing that alto. As far as me playing and getting those other feelings of what was going down, the music is so refreshing and it's so just grabbing you by the collar and pushing you on in, we all just all step on through it. And I had a solo on it; Brookmeyer and I both had solos. As far as the playing that night was concerned, there was one thing that happened — Gerald Wilson was coming to town to play and he had to get musicians. Not all of them; he brought a few with him, but he had to get musicians. And of course he went right to Thad and Mel's band and damn near took everybody. But he didn't take them all. And that made a lot of us miss a Monday night. Jimmy Owens was out, I was out, Richard was out. And I think Jerome Richardson was also out. Maybe it was about five of us.



Well, they didn't get rid of Richard. But they got rid of everybody except me and Jimmy. So I said, "Well, all right." Maybe that was one of the reasons I missed the second live thing that was there, because that's Tom McIntosh. So, I mean, that was cool. I wasn't worried about it because I was still working. But all of a sudden, Jerome — he's opinionated and he's very forthright and he can make those exchanges with people like Thad and Mel . . . and he did — about letting us go. So Mel called me in and said, "Do you want to come back?" or something like that. And I said, "Yeah." So that's how I got a second chance. I'd met Gerald in '57, two straight summers I was out in L.A., which is where I am now. And I played in his band with Charles Lloyd. And even when Ornette Coleman was running, that's when I first met him out there and all of that. But anyway, that is what happened. And Gerald just asked for the people. And I'm not sure who it was that he spoke with to ask us, but we were there and I'll never forget it. It was a great gig that we had. It was at Basin Street East.

Tell me about the trombone section. You talked about Tom McIntosh, who was on the second date, and we know Bob Brookmeyer was there. But what musical characteristics did you guys bring to the section?

I wasn't in New York at the time McIntosh was there, and others. I came into New York in July of 1962, so I was there and had to scramble around to get myself situated. Hustling. After all, Chico Hamilton wasn't making us rich. I knew some friends, especially people like Ernie Wilkins from Detroit, a fantastic arranger, and his brother also had a band in Detroit. So I would come to Ernie. He was always very encouraging; very nice and lovely. Great guy. I met Hubert Laws during that time and Marvin Stamm. I remember Marvin touching me in the back one day and saying "Oh hey, how you doing? My name is Marvin Stamm. Are you Garnett Brown?" I said "Yeah, right." We had never met. We were both from Memphis, but there were many reasons why none of that got together, as you know. That was still in the days in which things were very choosy about white and black musicians. People period. We had a nice chat and got to be really very good friends. Our daughters are almost the same in age and stuff. So that's been all those years that have gone by.

So the trombone section on opening night, it's you and Bobby Brookmeyer — and he's playing valve trombone. Any thoughts on the roles you guys played in the band?

Thad and Mel had already been around a long time by then. Thad was working with CBS. Nottingham was with CBS. Several people, too. But they must all have been just having a grand time, because when Thad put this band together, he got two musicians from the orchestra at CBS. That was the bass trombone player and the first trombone player. So I'm thinking he's really covering his bases, making sure he's covered with the finest. And they were lovely people. Everybody was just always happy and stuff. I'd always watch the guys who came out of the studio. And they really enjoyed themselves. So then there was Brookmeyer. It was a little unusual to have a valve trombone being the lead trombonist. But I heard something just today on the recording of "Don't Ever Leave Me," and there's a trombone solo there

and Brookmeyer played that like a slide trombone. You could hear it. It was just so warm. It was really beautiful. So it was him and me and the bass trombone player, Cliff Heather. The other one that I think was on with me at the same time was Jack Rains. Cliff Heather and Jack Rains were really the two that were the solid accompaniment to the accompaniment. Yeah, we were accompanying everyone else doing things. I should really say the accompaniment to the other two trombones. What I think is that they contributed so finely and so seriously, when Brookmeyer played that lead part on it. It was beautiful. I really hadn't remembered that while sitting up in the orchestra where I guess it's just one of those things where I was just intent on my own things to do at the time. I think Tom [McIntosh] got into the band because of them letting me go.

How did the crowd respond to the music the first several months you guys played at the Vanguard? It seems that there was quite a response on these recordings, the energy, and vibe that's totally happening.

There was absolutely nothing that took away from all of the energy and the excitement that the people in the audience enjoyed . . . and with Thad leading the band, of course. Thad was impeccable. He was a guy that if a trumpet player was late, he'd take his trumpet and run back and play any part in the trumpet section until the guy showed up. It never was that bad, of course, but I'm just saying that. What got me is he took all of my attention almost because he was right behind me when he came in to sub for somebody. But the people, I mean, they would practically be contributing more to that energy than the band did itself; it was energy meeting energy, and enjoyment meeting enjoyment. Because the stuff was so well together, but still open, where you could open it up for other little things to happen. I was listening to some things on that first piece I was telling you about and I didn't remember some of those little licks boy, but they were sure hitting it! I can happily say that I put in a few of those myself. That was it, as far as the trombones were concerned.

What were some of your favorite charts in the book and why?

"Mean What You Say." I don't think I had a solo or anything like that, but I'm just talking about the music all the way through and enjoying everybody else. It's just really something. And then another one I liked that was really fun, great fun, was "Mornin' Reverend."

Yeah, with the cowbell!

Yeah, that there . . . [SINGS, LAUGHS] . . .

Can you describe Thad's conducting and leading style?

Totally unique. We had to keep an eye on him because you never knew what he was going to do. I mean, he would be giving something to the saxophones and a trumpet player's playing and then the trombones would come in with Brookmeyer coming up with something to even contribute to what the saxes are doing. And all of it was just so, I want to say, right! It was so contributive that it took us all to different notches in terms of the progression and the ascension of what was happening with the band. And I enjoyed that, because Thad could come up with stuff that was different,

just like that music that he wrote. It was just absolutely outstanding. And Brookmeyer had some lovely things. They were simple, but then he would tell us what notes to play so then they weren't simple anymore! But what it did was to give even more energy and ascension to what we were playing. It was always fun to see wait and see what kinds of things he was going to put in there because Thad had a mind on him.

Do you feel that Thad and Mel's group changed the way that big bands performed and how composers wrote for large ensembles?

I don't think there's any doubt about it. I will say this: when I came out to L.A. with Thad's band for a minute and Gerald Wilson had a radio show at the time, Gerald invited me to come on for an interview. And we were talking about Thad and Gerald said, "There's something I wanted to tell you, man. I think they got Thad." I said, "What do you mean?" He says, "The stuff that I've been hearing on the radio, some of the musicians, whoever they are, and the arrangers and stuff must've heard something in Thad and them back in New York that they liked, and they hired some people to try and emulate [Thad] the best they could in doing some of these commercials and things."

What did the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra do for your career?

Got me a lot of gigs.

Finally, if you were to write a paragraph about the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra for a jazz history book, what would you say?

Well first of all, I would certainly try to remember some of the guys who were in that band who contributed so much to it. Thad and Mel, their names coincided with a wonderful feeling of camaraderie. A lot of different people came through the band - lovingly. And even after I came out to California, I heard stories about how wonderful they felt. And there were people like Frank Foster and Joe Farrell and the grand baritone saxophonist of all time, Pepper Adams. So people like that, to say nothing about Snooky Young, Jerome and the rest of them.

EDDIE DANIELS SPEAKS WITH ZEV FELDMAN AND CHRIS SMITH

Chris Smith: About your joining the band, you said you had played a gig with Tony Scott, where Thad and Mel had heard you and Thad and Mel had asked you to join them even though you didn't really know them too much personally. They liked your playing and it was kind of a surprise to you that you had gotten into the band.

Eddie Daniels: I was playing at the Half Note with Tony Scott. I'm playing tenor and it was a good rhythm section and Thad and Mel come in. I don't think they even said hi, 'cause I didn't know either of them then. I'm not even sure I actually even met them that night. But I think based on their hearing me play, I got a call the next week. They said they had heard me; they had come in and wanted to hire me for the band. But it was a kind of a shock: they walk in and I'm just playing with Tony Scott and I don't even know Thad and Mel. So it was kind of a surprise.

Do you remember the first rehearsals for the band, when you guys got together in November?

Yeah, I remember it was a studio above Manny's on West 48th Street between 6th and 7th. Where Manny's used to be anyway. I do remember the happening of the very first rehearsal and seeing all these guys, you know. It was amazing. Especially names I'd heard of, but didn't really know; I vaguely knew them, 'cause I was a young guy. I was the youngest guy in the band, when the band was actually finally put together. Hank Jones was the first piano player.

He was. He is on these recordings in fact.

Yeah, and I think it was Joe Farrell. The sax section as we know it during that period with Pepper and Jerome and Jerry Dodgion and myself. It was an exciting moment. Very, very exciting. God, we're talking 50 years ago?

Well, 50 now.

That moment was a very exciting first get-together of a band. And we played a couple of things . . . I don't even think we played a lot of stuff. We played a couple of tunes. And it wasn't like rehearsal rehearsal — get super serious. I think it was almost like everybody meeting each other and we played a little. I don't even remember what we played. It was more like, "Now we get down to business."



L to R: Joe Farrell, Jerry Dodgion, Jerome Richardson, Eddie Daniels, Marvin Holladay. © Raymond Ross Archives/CTSImages

On the opening night were you guys in the band nervous? Were you concerned about people showing up to support the music?

Oh no. I think it was a sellout right away. You know, at the Village Vanguard, you could bring a minyan there and you could sell out. It was a small space. But the feeling was like every Monday night was kind of the opening night. Very exciting. The band was just . . . this new creature. A new creature that was coming out the scene. I don't think anybody thought about whether there was going to be an audience or not. I don't think that was even an issue. We had a couple of rehearsals and then we played an opening night. I had my one tune, "Mean What You Say," that I played on, which I remember that I had to have together and know. And it was something I played there many, many times. I just remember the guys, I think Nottingham was there, right? Jimmy Nottingham?

Yep.

He and Jerome just like, doing their talking back and forth with their horns, you know, which was like, "Fuck you, goddammit!" They would do that little talking with their instruments. Who knew that would become kind of a history? I was proud to be in that band. I was the little kid who kinda knew nothing. And with my mouth open listening to all these great players. 50 years!

Zev Feldman: What do you remember about Thad?

You know, the sweetness of that man. Such a sweet soul. Although he could give you shit at the same time.

How so?

He knew I was the youngest, edgiest guy in the band who wanted to play more. I'm sitting right in front of him and he's leading the band right in front of me. And he knows all he'd have to do is point to me and I'd jump up and play a gazillion notes. That would be the energy of a 25-year-old at that point. I'm in this band and I want to show what I can do. He knew that. And I think he purposely suppressed that feeling in me. I mean, I had my chances to play. And I think he felt it and so sometimes he played upon it. Sometimes I'd have nights where I didn't play at all. And I guess that was my learning. That was the master giving the student some teaching about "Maybe it's not all about solos." And it's funny, 'cause when I did an album with Hank, *Mean What You Say* — I called it that based on my tune Thad wrote for me. And when I was hanging with Hank, he said, "You know, Thad really loved you." What a sweet thing to have it come through his brother. You know, 'cause Thad never said, "Eddie, I love you." He'd hug me, we'd hug each other. He hugged everybody. And he loved everybody. But to hear that come from Hank was really a special thing. And I'm sure he loved everybody; you could see the band was his baby. It was his child. And how exciting for guys — and I think this is par for the course back then — they were all pretty popular recording guys. TV guys. All the guys who were doing the work in those days. Thad's doing Ed Sullivan. Mel Lewis is doing Kraft Music Hall, which was a big show then.

Chris Smith: And I think Richard was on that too.

So they were working guys doing their gig. And Mel and Thad at some point had a gig together and somehow it evolved and they said, "Let's get a band! Let's do our own thing. Enough of this commercial stuff, which we like, but let's play jazz." So it's interesting. Interesting time. And I went through that too myself, because while I was in Thad's band and I was doing *The Tonight Show*, *The Dick Cavett Show*, the band had a trip to Russia and Bobby Rosengarden didn't want me to take off to do it. And Mel said, "You either come to Russia with us or you leave the band." He put me in that spot, which is really the spot they both started from, in a sense. "We gotta play jazz, man. You know? We have our gig, but let's form a band." And so there they kinda put me in that bind having to choose between going to Russia or giving up your major gig — being on staff on ABC or going to Russia with the band. So that was an interesting experience.

We haven't talked to anybody about that saxophone section, and I was curious if you could tell us a little bit about what each musician brought to that section. We can hear it some in their playing, but who was the leader? Who was the jokester? How was that saxophone section?

Well, Jerome was the lead alto and we followed him. And that's what a good section does. I think everybody in that section, we all listened to each other. Sometimes when I go to play with other bands, or I'll do a clinic at a high school or a good college band, you know, sometimes you hear one of the saxes playing too loud for his seat. Overshadowing and not listening to the lead alto. In this band, everybody listened to Jerome. When the saxes had their thing, he was our voice and we were below that, and that's what a section is. We kind of lose ourselves — our separate identity — in the sound of our section, which is a great thing. It's one of the things I loved about the band — about being in the band — was playing with a group of guys like the saxes. And I was especially honored to have someone like Thad write these amazing solo passages that featured the saxes. You'd have the big brass section, you know, screaming stuff, but then in between, the stuff that glued all of that together — or the trumpets glued that together — was this streaming, rolling, beautiful soli section of saxes. Speaking in a voice, in one voice. And Pepper. Everybody in that section had their own solo voice. Pepper had a sound like no one else. Jerry Dodgion has his own sound. Joe Farrell had his own solo sound. But when we played together I think the art of the section came out.

I heard something on the radio, "Groove Merchant." When the sax soli comes in and you don't hear the solo; you don't hear anyone sticking out. It's one organism floating through this. If I had to pick myself out or Pepper out or . . . You could hear Jerome, because he's playing the lead, but it's so subtle that he is the tinsel on top of the Christmas tree of all of the sounds of this music that's flowing out together, like we're just oozing together. And I love that. Just having that kind of feeling amongst that. There's a joy in that kind of playing. Where you lose yourself in the sound of something so great that we are all it. And when Jerome played the lead . . . he had a beautiful way of playing lead. And his own quality and also his own personality. And you never heard any one sax stick out where you might hear that in bands

that were not as proficient as that band. Or as good as that band. All of us had done a lot of commercial work.

I was on *The Dick Cavett Show* at the time. I actually took Jerome's place on *The Dick Cavett Show*. He left the show because he had other gigs he wanted to do. So luckily, I was the one who got called because I'm the one sitting next to him in the section. And because by that time people know that the guys who were playing in Thad Jones's band were good section players. And so that's why I think I got called to do a gig where you had to be a good section player. And I was like the swing guy where one night a week I'd switch and I had to play baritone one night or alto another night. Sometimes I'd play the lead alto chair. So all of that had to do with, gee, viably commercial players — just like Mel was, just like Thad was; we were all doing a TV show or something like that — and when you finally get the band, you know how to play in an ensemble. And I think that's the beauty of that band. And you wouldn't say it's like one of the tightest ensembles, you know, cleanest-tightest. I don't think it was that. In terms of clean playing. 'Cause you know, if you take Gordon Goodwin's band today — and they work a lot and they play a lot. Maybe the playing is cleaner . . . see, Thad's band had the cleanliness and the spit together. You know what I mean? That's what gave it the real jazz feeling. It didn't have to be like perfectly too clean, but it was clean enough that cleanliness wasn't something you'd say, "God is that a clean-sounding band!" It had the dirt and the shit and all of the spit at the same time, it being clean — but not too clean.

Sure.

That's an important point that I never quite thought about before. I think that's because the character of the music and the way it swung had that looseness in it. I'm even thinking of that soli section that we just mentioned on "Groove Merchant": be-bada, be-bada da, do; DA . . . If you played that triplet: ta ta ta ta ta ta DA, you know, like Fred Astaire would dance it, it wouldn't work. So that the music itself — the line that Thad wrote — had that looseness and beauty in it so that we're all waving like a scarf in the breeze, as we're floating, as Mel's tapping so beautifully on the cymbal and just giving us that ride. The looseness and the clarity and the beauty at the same time.

You know, sometimes when I listen to Indian music — and I love Indian music — I marvel at it. It might be in a very complex time feel, you know, nine sixteenths, or whatever, and it's very tight and it's very clean. And then I listen to the band and how loose and beautiful it was and I realize the difference and the character that that music had; the soul of the big band of music at that moment. It captured the continuity of what bands had done up to that point and just was singing. Maybe that's what it was — the whole thing was just singing. And I still love Indian music, of course.

Doesn't have that grit.

It's a different kind of thing. This band incorporates what jazz is, which is personal feeling. So you have a big band with a lot of guys who just, as a band . . . it expresses this personal feeling of Thad and all of us with the line and the swing and the relaxed feel of Mel and how he could just be

so relaxed and propel the band without pushing it too hard. That's where that little image of like a silk cloth just waving in the wind as the wind was just like propelling it comes from. And the saxes could be that little silk just floating on the ride cymbal and Roland and all of it, and we're just lost in the clouds.

People are dropping out, rhythm section members are coming in and out. What was happening during all of that?

We pretty much knew when, but every once in a while, he'd take his arm and he'd go "Ah!" like he's slapping someone across the face — but he means, "CUT!" Right? And he's pointing to Mel and he's pointing to Richard and maybe whoever he wanted to hear at that moment. But it was never so out-of-the-realm that we were in shock. It kind of had its own boundaries. We knew he might choose Billy Harper at a moment to play something, but it was in a tune that he did play on. He wouldn't have him play on something he hadn't played before. We were all kind of sensitive to him. Without him even beating anything. We're watching his face. We're hearing him. And we're all one. Because it is the band. It would be as if somebody would say "Hey, I got a gig with the band," it was the band at that time. The band. And whatever he did, it would be great.

It's funny. I've actually, myself, taken a little of that at times — when I go out and play with rhythm sections and I'll stop someone and I'll play alone with the bass or with the drums. I learned that from Thad: how he could change a mood and a context so quickly. And then he might start a riff with the band where he'd point to the trumpets and play something and they'd pick it up right away. And then he would point to the saxes and have another one, and before you'd know it you had the whole band rocking back and forth from something he just invented that was not in the chart. So it was a very subtle kind of conducting, and it was not like he was the Boss Boss. We all loved him. We were all one. It was a very warm, cuddly feeling being a part of that band.

One time we went to London, and all the books got lost, we never recovered all of that music. On the plane, the plane lost all of our music. We had to play a concert in, I forget which hall, one of the famous halls in London, without any music! I mean, it was unbelievable. And none of us memorized any of those tunes. We didn't play enough; once a week was not enough to memorize. If you went on the road with a band and you played the same charts for a year, like Basie's band or whatever, you might know your charts. So we played a whole night with Thad making up licks and pointing to soloists. And before you knew it, he created a line for the trumpets and the saxes — a whole new arrangement. So an interesting kind of conducting, yeah, definitely interesting. His head for contrast — I think that's the beautiful thing about him. Suddenly the band is like swinging and burning and then he'd, "CUT!" with his arm, one big slash with his big, huge arm. You couldn't miss it. And we're all watching him. Nobody was ever buried in the music so that we didn't see him, like a lot of symphonic musicians are. They don't like the conductor. Most of them never even look at the conductor. This was different. This was like an organic band where all the blood supplies are connected. I kind of like that image. We're all connected; our blood supplies

are all connected through the leader to each other. So there's no such thing as not seeing the leader.

He liked contrast in sound and in color. He cut this big, fat, huge trumpet lick, cut it, and then point to Richard and just have Richard play by himself. With Mel possibly. To just, like, shock us back into who we are. There was almost something in him that kept on going back from this huge, swinging, soli, outrageous feel with the trumpets and the saxes, to nothing. Where suddenly it's Richard playing a bass line and Richard's going, "Heh-heh." He's doing his little kind of laugh that he does? He'd kind of giggle at it. And here he was stuck. And he's just walking. And maybe playing a solo. And then Thad would point to Roland or he'd point to another soloist. I always wished it were me, but it wasn't. [Laughs] Youngest guy in the band, you know. He pointed to me sometimes, it wasn't always that way. So that part was really such a great learning experience. Hearing how he felt the big band was a color and a voice of not just him, but of all of us. And everybody has their voice. That Nottingham and Jerome could just like curse at each other right there, you know.

Zev Feldman: What was Mel's role in the band? How did his drumming affect the band's musical direction?

Thad was the leader but Mel was the substratum of the pulse of the band that really gave the feeling of time; that special, relaxed, floating thing that he had. That special Mel Lewis thing that no other drummer had that many of people have tried to emulate.

We were talking with Jim McNeely the other day and he talked about that. That was a very unique way of driving a big band.

Mel Lewis was not a Buddy Rich type player. He didn't have a lot of chops. He had his own kind of chops. You know, he didn't have the classic huge, fast drum kind of chops. Neither did Elvin Jones. And especially thinking of big band drummers, you know, Sonny Payne, drummers who would lead a big band with a cannon as a sword. Mel led the band, kind of . . . I go back to that we're all attached by this infusion of blood; that we're all connected. But the blood is dripping from the IV bottle that's held above. We're all getting an infusion of blood into our system, and Mel is having the drip-drip come from him. He's the speed of the dripping of the blood that goes into our system. That really relaxes us and keeps it going. I don't remember there ever being a time where Thad had to speed up the band because he thought that the tempo was too slow or he had to push something because the time wasn't right. Where he wanted to change a feel of the time. I don't remember that ever happening.

And Mel was very subtle. He knew Thad was kind of the boss, and yet, Mel in a subtle way, without his time, there is no band. Kind of like a marriage of a man and a woman. The guy thinks he's the boss, but the wife knows that she's in control. And so Mel was kind of like that. He was really, probably the most controlling element of the actual feel of the band. And it's such a subtle thing, such a subtle thing. That you can't even pinpoint, you could say that he was so relaxed . . . He also had a great sounding cymbal. That was his best cymbal, that had a big gash in it, and a cut in it, that had broken

at one point. That sound of that cymbal was so important to him, that that cymbal, the big ride cymbal was the sound of the band. That was his sound. And he was like the mother of the band too. The friendly, close-knit, balance to the father of the band. Not necessarily the male and female, but just kind of using that for the moment.

How would you say the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra differed from other bands like Basie, Ellington and Woody's?

Basie's band, you know, was quite individual because of the writing, some of which Thad did when he was in that band. Right?

Of course, and in the arranging. I just think he continues a lot of that school. I definitely think he was carrying the torch in some ways.

Again, you have a band that came together from two musicians who were not only great jazz players, but who also played commercial music.

Do you think Thad and Mel's group changed the way that the big band performed and how composers wrote for larger ensembles?

Oh yeah! Absolutely. Even today. I've gone to Germany and played with the WDR band and played some of Thad and Mel's music and it sounds as fresh today as it did back then. Even today you hear a lot of the kind of writing that Thad laid the groundwork for. People that have gone ahead like Maria Schneider and other great writers have taken the big band genre in a whole other direction, but some of it came from Thad's ensemble writing and the way he voiced certain things. But things change. There's always an evolution. Nothing's gonna stay the same. I think the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra was an epitome of big bands at that moment. It was the next evolution of the big band with guys who played commercial music but who were also ridiculous jazz players. Zany, very zany!

It has been said that Thad and Mel unintentionally created a mixed-race band with players of different generations. This was significant in 1966. Was this ever brought up? Did it ever cross your mind?

Never. It's funny, I'm talking with you about it now, because it was an integrated band. But who the hell thought about that? Thad hired the guys he loved for the music they played. It was just . . . they listened to players and they hired the musicians they wanted. And that was one of the beautiful things about the band, and a great thing for me as a young person sitting in that band and being a part of it. That's why the blood transfusion, I like that image, we're all getting a transfusion. Mel's got the drip and Thad's maybe controlling when he wants to stop the drip! And then segue to a bass solo, you know . . .

Overall, what did the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra do for your career?

It kind of put me on the map. If I weren't in that band at that time — I was very lucky to have had that one gig with Tony Scott where Thad and Mel came in and heard me — to be put on the map where I'm being heard by people at the Village Vanguard . . . It's funny. I was also at Julliard at the same time, and I was getting my master's degree while I was playing at the

Vanguard in 1966. A friend of mine, Billy Kerr, who is a very fine saxophone player was at Juilliard with me and we were just in an ensemble together, and I never let on and said what I did. And at one point I lent him one of my clarinets, because he needed an A clarinet, so I gave him my instrument and transposed the B-flat. And that Monday he came down to the Vanguard and he's standing at the door waiting to come in and he's hearing this tenor playing and he's going "Holy shit! Who the fuck is that?" And then as he turns through the door he sees it's me, the guy from Juilliard who lent him the clarinet! He just told me this story a couple of months ago, what a funny story. Because another funny part of this whole thing was that I went to Juilliard and I never got my diploma — they never sent it to me until 50 years later.

If you were to write a paragraph about the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra for a jazz history book what would you say?

Kind of what I said before, it was the epitome of the combination of great jazz players and commercial people who also could sit in a symphony and do recordings and could read anything. So it was like a variety of different musicians who came, not just from the jazz field, but who also had to play commercial music for a living. So that gave all of these musicians another quality. And the freedom of their expression, and the value of the gamut of stuff that all of us had to play to make a living. Plus we all loved jazz so much that we decided we're going to do jazz, but the thing we all could do with a flexibility. And that's why Thad could stop the band at any time; because we'd been watching conductors in other situations. We were very aware of cooperating and blending and being part of something that's a collaboration. As opposed to just going out and playing jazz gigs and having your own thing. It's just something slightly different in that Mel could play a different feel on the drums that you might not hear on a jazz record, because he had to. So I would say one of the most flexible, most swinging . . . connected to the blood stream — I'll go back to that image — as connected to the blood stream as any big band could possibly be.

Do you have anything else in closing you'd like to say?

I have nothing but love for Thad and Mel, and for them putting themselves out to do this and being willing to share it with me. Even though I didn't get all the solos! [Laughs] But you know what's funny? Now I get all the solos because I got hired to come and play solos. So I say, "God gave me what I asked for." So we do come out and we play a concert, and I frequently go out and play big band stuff. And one of the things I'm playing now, one of Thad's — "Quietude." And when I was in Copenhagen, playing with that band, they said "Why don't you play 'Quietude'?" And I said, "Yeah, I'd love to, I've never played it." They had originally written it for Buddy DeFranco, and so I've added that to my book and I just love it. . . I'll even play "Mornin' Reverend." But to get out and play — and now I'm playing that stuff as much as I want — which is great. I guess that's growing up. You play as much as you want and then you say to yourself "Did I really want to play this much?" [Laughs] No, I have the energy to do it and I love it.

RICHARD DAVIS REFLECTS ON THE THAD JONES/ MEL LEWIS ORCHESTRA

Zev Feldman: When exactly did your musical relationship begin with Thad and Mel?

Richard Davis: Well, with Thad and Mel, different times. Mel and I worked together quite a bit before they got that band. And I was on some dates and Thad was on them too.

Who asked you to join the band? How did all that come about?

It was Mel.

Mel called you?

Yeah.

During the November rehearsals in '65, did you have any feeling that the band was going to become such a success?

Amazing. Actually, I had no idea at all. We did have great musicians there, but . . . I wasn't really thinking about it.

What were your first impressions of Thad's charts?

Phenomenal. A new wave in big band music.

What was your impression of Mel's drumming on Thad's charts.

Well, Mel, they call him tailor-made. He was designed to be a part of that band. He and I played so well together. It was very easy. He and I had done lots of things together — before the band. Mel Lewis is one of the best drummers ever in the world.

How much, if any, musical direction did Thad and Mel give you in those initial rehearsals, would you say?

None.

Okay. What do you remember from February 7, 1966 on the opening night at the Vanguard?

The room was filled with excitement. And you could tell that people were just enthralled with the band. It was a great band. A sensation.

Can you describe the attitude and the vibe of the band members that night?

Same thing. Everybody loved each other. And glad to be involved. We knew that something was going on.

Let me ask you, it was a Monday night in Manhattan, kind of the off night for a lot of music. Were you surprised that the opening night was so well attended?

I wasn't surprised. That was an all-star band. People started hearing about it before we played there. So there were no surprises about that band. It's how it was supposed to happen.

Do you remember how much money you made that night on that gig, and how it compared to some of the other gigs you had back in '66?

Probably wasn't worth mentioning. I was doing a lot of work with recording all day long everyday. So that was like, I wouldn't worry about the money.

As the story goes, lines formed outside the club every Monday night after the opening night. Do you remember how long that went on for?

As long as we were there.

I know you were in the band from the very beginning. How long did you play with Thad and Mel?

I think it was 5 years.

How did Thad Jones's bass parts differ from other composers' bass parts?

Well, usually a bass part is just the chord structure, where you make up your own lines. But the lines that he did write were very interesting. A lot different than anybody else.

Did you have any favorite charts in the book that you liked to play?

Yeah. But see, with a big band, as a bass player your role is already set. We know what songs were going to feature the bass. And then after a while, that gets boring 'cause you're featured on a particular song or songs. And that's probably why I left the band. 'Cause I just felt, "Ran the gamut, time to move on."

I noticed with some of Thad's arrangements, sometimes the rhythm section was really the focus. And then Thad would bring in the horns on top. That was unique. It seemed that because of that approach, you had more freedom to stretch. Was that the case?

That was the case.

That was something different that set Thad's charts apart from those of other arrangers. Especially when all of a sudden it's pared down to the trio and a soloist and then things build again.

Well, Thad had a way of feeding in and out of different groups. Brass, reeds and rhythm section. He had a phenomenal way of keeping it interesting in that way.

You played many unique solos while you were with the band. Did Thad or Mel ever give you feedback on your playing?

No. They never gave anybody feedback.

That makes sense.

Great musicians.

Could you talk a little bit about Thad's conducting, and his leading style?

Yeah, it was unique too. It was very powerful. Just his physical appearance was powerful. His expressions and his ideas of nuances were very interesting. He had a gift for that.

Could you talk a little bit about Mel's role in the band? How would you describe his role?

Co-leader. Co-leader definitely. Also, his drumming was phenomenal for that band.

How would you say his drumming affected the musical direction of the group?

Well, he was a phenomenal drummer. And he had a hell of a memory. He remembered all those charts without even reading the music.

How would you say the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra differed from some of the other bands like Basie, Ellington and Woody Herman's group?

Well, it was a different approach because of Thad's concept. Through history, there are great writers who specialize — or should I say demonstrated — great skills in the reed section. And Thad had a gift for writing for reeds. It was very powerful. Everything he wrote was just . . . a new wave. People are still using those same charts now, you know, 'cause they're so great.

Do you think Thad and Mel's group changed the way big bands perform? How composers wrote for large ensembles? Do you think they set the tone for the ways that big bands performed and composers wrote for large ensembles? Do you think they had something to do with that?

I would think so. I've never asked anybody, but I would think so.

Finally, do you feel that the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra reached its musical potential? And also its commercial potential?

I would say creative potential. Commercial potential, I can't answer that one. Because I don't know how far it would've gone.

In closing, do you have anything you would like to say about this project, or from your experience working with this band?

I would say that Thad Jones had a football coach's mentality. Making people want to play — with the warmth that makes them feel dedicated to the music. But see, the music was so good, you couldn't help but feel dedicated to it.

JERRY DODGION SPEAKS WITH ZEV FELDMAN AND CHRIS SMITH

Zev Feldman: How did you come to join the band?

Jerry Dodgion: I used to hear Thad in the Basie band. They would come to San Francisco and they would spend some time in the Bay Area playing different cities all around. That was the band in the mid-'50s. Back then, Basie had Snooky Young, Frank Foster and Frank Wess. Joe Newman and Thad were the two featured trumpet players and they were both great. Joe Newman was from New Orleans and he played with great swing and great spirit. Unbelievable. Just perfect for Count Basie. And then Thad would play, and rhythmically he was right in there too.

There was no competition between them. But Thad's improvising melodies were always different all the time. It really intrigued me; he had rapidly become one of my favorite musicians. And I said to myself — I never said this to anybody else — I just said it to myself, "I hope I get good enough to play with him some day." That's no kidding! And it did happen a number of years later.

I knew Mel, but I didn't know him very long. I met him just before going to Russia with him with Benny Goodman. We both played with Peggy Lee: I'd been playing with Peggy Lee when she came to town in New York. This time, Mel Lewis was the drummer and that's when I met him. And then, right after that, we started rehearsing with Benny. Then we went to Russia.

I met Thad one night when we were listening to Basie at a club in San Francisco and Ralph Gleason — he was a very prominent jazz writer at the time — and Ralph introduced me to Thad. That's the first time I ever met him. That night I went to an after-hours club there called Bop City; I used to go there to play now and then. I went in — I knew the owner and said hello to him — and as I was taking a seat, he was making an announcement: he said, "On the next set we're going to have Percy Heath on the bass, Milt Jackson playing piano," and one of the regular drummers, I don't remember who it was, "and Thad Jones and Jerry Dodgion." And I said, "Holy shit!" See I'm not aggressive, I would never approach Thad and say I want to play with you. I never had to make a call for any job since coming to New York. Anyway, it was Mel who called me and said, "Listen, Thad Jones and I are starting a band, and we wanted to know if you'd like to be a part of it?" And I said, "I wouldn't miss it for anything in the world!" And I meant that sincerely, because I knew Thad and Mel separately, not as a combo, and to me I thought, well offhand it sounded like an odd couple, but the music's gotta be great. . And you know how many new bands you play with when you're a young musician. This one was the most special-sounding one to me before we even played a note. So I was just totally amazed when Mel called me, because I remembered thinking I'd like to play with Thad Jones some time, and it was just amazing to me. And then when we started — I remember the very first rehearsal and everything. Oh my God, I'm getting flashbacks right now!

Actually, you're right on time here, because I was going to ask you what you remembered about the band's first rehearsals.

Well, the personnel was great. It was not a young band. I was the third youngest guy. I was 33, I think, and Joe Farrell was two years younger than me. We were the three youngest guys in the band. So all the other guys were older, and there were a lot of band players. I mean really experienced band players. So the first note we hit was amazing, right there. And Thad was amazed too. I remember he was totally amazed because he had never had his own band before like that. Ever. And it was coming together really amazingly at the first rehearsal. And the first rehearsal started at midnight! That was the only time you could get these guys together because a lot of them had busy work schedules during the day. Some of the guys were on staff at CBS, which did *The Ed Sullivan Show* and Thad was in that band. It was full of veteran ensemble players who knew how to play in a band. And Thad had never studied conducting, but he knew how to conduct his own music and he was a great conductor. He did it his way, you know.

Zev Feldman: Can you talk about your first impressions of Thad's new compositions?

You know, there was magic at the first rehearsal. There was magic at every rehearsal. Every time we would have a rehearsal, which was very rare, that meant that Thad had some new music and that was so exciting. It was so exciting to be in the room when Thad pulled out some new music. It was just amazing. "What's this gonna be like?" It's more exciting than a kid on Christmas. It's unbelievable. And there was nobody who was a negative critic of Thad's music in the band — that I knew of. If there was, they were never there for very long. And also, the other musicians started hearing about it. I think the second or third rehearsal Phil Woods and Gene Quill came in together. The word of mouth was getting around fast about the band.

Chris Smith: Do you remember how much musical direction Thad and/or Mel gave you during those rehearsals?

He had a band of great professionals who could play his music, so he didn't have to do much, he just counted off. And he was just as surprised as everybody else how beautiful it was. He had come to a couple of Duke Pearson's rehearsals; he played in the trumpet section. And this was before Thad and Mel had a band. And he brought some arrangements and we tried to play 'em. But we couldn't play them with Duke Pearson's band. They just didn't work. And they didn't work because Duke Pearson's band is Duke's band. He's rehearsing the band, not Thad. And he didn't ask Thad to rehearse the numbers or else we would have been able to play them. That's just logical. Now I remember seeing those numbers still in Duke Pearson's band in the book every time we rehearsed after that. And then those were some of the same numbers we played when Thad and Mel had the band. Like "Second Race" and "The Little Pixie" and things like that.

Zev Feldman: How about Mel's drumming?

I'd heard Mel play when I was with Red Norvo. We worked a lot in Las Vegas and we'd go into L.A. to do a TV show now and then. And John Markham, the drummer, and I went around and we heard the Terry Gibbs band and we heard Mel play. That's the first time I heard him play live, I think. And then the next time — well it was the first time I played with him — I played



L to R: Richard Davis, Mel Lewis, Bill Berry, Joe Farrell, Snooky Young, Cliff Heather, Jerry Dodgion, Marvin Stamm, Sam Herman, Bob Brookmeyer, Jimmy Nottingham, Jerome Richardson, Tom McIntosh, Richard Williams, Eddie Daniels, Thad Jones. © Raymond Ross Archives/CTS IMAGES

with him and with Peggy Lee. And that was good, because she always had good arrangements, a lot of Quincy Jones and Billy Byers arrangements.

Chris Smith: Did his playing sound different with Thad's music to you?

To me it was all brand new. I knew Hank, I'd played with him on record dates and things. I knew Richard Davis. I knew everybody. But I'd never known them and seen them to be enjoying the music they're playing so much. There was something about playing with Thad; with Thad's leading. He's very appreciative of everything and he didn't run it like he was "the boss." He was just in charge of the music.

Zev Feldman: What do you remember about February 7, 1966 on the opening night?

Well, the place was packed. In 1966, the Vanguard wasn't doing so great. Name acts during the week, they weren't doing that great. They were just surviving. Alan Grant was the guy who got us two Mondays at the Vanguard. And Thad and Mel were excited about that: "Hey, we got two Mondays at the Village Vanguard," not even thinking for a minute that it was going to be more than two Mondays. "Cause we'd all played during those years and we'd all played with bands who would give anything to have just one night at the Village Vanguard. And that's the end of it; you're never gonna play there again. I don't know if anybody was looking to the future because the present was so jam-packed with beautiful reality. It was great! It was so packed that when we'd go on intermission it would take so long to get from the bandstand to the kitchen because there were so many people. And when you're passing every table they have some comment, some positive and exclamatory compliments and stuff. It was an effort to get to the kitchen from the bandstand. I remember that so well.

And there's one song that at the very first rehearsal — which was not the first song — we had been rehearsing for about an hour and Thad called up "Back Bone." And we hadn't played it yet, and he says, "Everybody got 'Back Bone'?" Then he says, "Dodge," and he points to me and says, "You start playing the blues in the key of C" and he starts snapping his fingers. And I said, "By myself?" And he says, "Yeah!" And I say, "Oh God!" [Laughs] So I start playing by myself, and then pretty soon he brings in the bass, and the drums maybe, and then the piano later, and then once in a while he would wave them out and I'd still be playing by myself. I don't know how to say this, but I mean sometimes you play; you play way over your head, and that would happen to me a lot on that number because I'd have no idea what to expect. But I learned really early that you gotta keep your place because you just don't know. He might bring them in and only have 'em play two bars, and then you're out again for two choruses. Who knows? He was so creative in his spontaneity. There was no figuring him out. And if you listen to Thad play, that's why. He was a true improviser. He didn't play licks. He truly improvised. One of the really true improvisers. For example, he's one of the few guys in the world who could play a major 3rd in a minor chord and it's not the wrong note. He makes music of whatever he plays. Miles Davis could do that too, but Thad could do it as well. His music was so interesting to me. It was just amazing.

Chris Smith: Do you remember any people, musicians or otherwise that came down to hear you guys the first couple of months?

A lot of the professionals came the first two Mondays. That's all we knew we were going to play was two Mondays. If a musician came in and had a union card he could get in for one dollar. [Laughs] How 'bout that? I think admission was \$2.50. Guys that I'd never seen in nightclubs . . . all the guys I had seen on record dates and stuff, they came down. Bernie Leighton, Sol Gubin, guys that you never saw them show any excitement for live music. Well, maybe they were waiting for something like this. Anyway, a lot of them started coming out. Immediately. So it was like we had some kind of unwritten, unspoken approval that this is the place to be when you gotta hear some music, right here. And I noticed in our rehearsing, that the crowd of musicians that came to listen got bigger and bigger each time. That was encouraging. It was nice. It was an unbelievable experience. I don't know how else to say it. And it was so positive. Especially for me because I already had this attraction to Thad and his music.

We talked about "Back Bone," but were there any other charts of yours in the book and why were they important to you?

They were all my favorites. There was nothing that Thad wrote that was a drag to play twice. Especially with him leading. That was so important. With him leading and playing his own music, it was like something that he'd probably dreamed of all his life. Even the stuff he wrote for Basie, he wasn't leading the band when they played that. So when he led it, it was just unbelievable. And Mel was right in his pocket. Mel was unbelievable too. You know, if the tempo were in something and Thad says, "Mel let's pick us up here." Wherever Thad clapped his hands that was the place to be, that was the best sounding place in the world. So whenever he'd want to change whatever groove we were in — which was not often — just once in a while, he'd look at Mel and clap his hands and Mel would do it. I knew Mel well enough to know that Mel would not change the tempo for God, but when Thad said let's pick this up just a hair right here, he would do it. He would do it for Thad. So he was the perfect co-leader for Thad. It was unbelievable! As a pair, they were an odd couple that made the music work so beautifully.

How did the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra differ from the other big bands like Basie, Ellington and Woody Herman's band?

It was different. It wasn't like any of those. Well Thad was with Basie for I think nine years. So that was his introduction to a permanent big band. And that's where he learned to write. He had such great ears. He'd just listen to an arrangement and know what it sounded like and knew what that would look like on the score. He didn't have to be analytical. He had a direct line with music. And his family, with his other two brothers, everyone had a direct line to music. I talked to him about that a little bit. He said the only music he heard as a young musician, as a young man before he started playing, was in the church. That's the only live music they heard. Then eventually with the radio, Thad found Duke Ellington when they would play live radio broadcasts and stuff like that. I used to say, "If they had a family dog,

then the dog could probably sing arias," there was such a musical environment there. And yet, Hank was so much older than the rest of them that he was already gone when Thad and Elvin were young musicians developing. He was already on the road with everybody in the world — Jazz at the Philharmonic. I heard him on Jazz at the Philharmonic when I was still in high school.

Chris Smith: Something that has been brought up some was you had mentioned that the band wasn't necessarily a very young band, but the band was also a pretty mixed band racially, which was a change of pace. Did you notice that that happened, was it of note at the time?

Oh yeah, sure. But it wasn't new to me. In my whole musical career, even before I left San Francisco, I was playing with mixed bands. So for me personally, I had a lot of great experience in the San Francisco area. I mean, I was 22 when I played with Billie Holiday for two weeks. That's because my really heavyweight jazz stuff started when I played with Gerald Wilson in San Francisco. And that was a mixed band. That's where I met Jerome Richardson, and sat between Jerome and Teddy Edwards. And then it turned out Jerome — when I met Jerome I had no idea that he was going to actually be one of my mentors and I was going to have a 50-year friendship with him. It's unbelievable. There's no way you can look forward and see any of this stuff happening. It was just great to experience it. To be in good health for 50 years and experience it is unbelievable. I had lots of help. As I mentioned before, I'm not aggressive, I wouldn't have gotten anywhere without help and I had lots of help from lots of people. That afforded me a place to view everything around me and appreciate it. I appreciate it so much.

You had done so many things musically at that point, what did the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra do for your career from 1966 to present?

I think it probably did a lot because I always get great encouragement from great musicians. Not so much my peers, but really great musicians. I think my peers were waiting for me to fall on my face! [Laughs] For example, after the first rehearsal, when Thad had me playing to start off "Back Bone," and every time we played that piece he had me start it off. So I could play by myself maybe for a little bit, maybe even rubato for a little bit, and he would start snapping his fingers or clapping his hands, and he might go into a tempo. Always a little different. You never know what he was going to do. I had two of the greatest compliments of my entire life: we sat down for the second set one time, getting ready to play, and right in front, there's a little round table at the Vanguard right in front, between Jerome and me, is Cannonball sitting right there! So Thad goes, "Let's see, what'll we play?" He says, "Well let's play number six." And that's "Back Bone," so I said, "Oh, shit!" And Jerome just fell back laughing. When he would laugh, you know, he was a big guy, and when he laughed the walls would vibrate. But turned out to be lucky for me. Sometimes I got lucky.

The experience that helped me more than anything was that kind of stuff. Exposure to the real stuff, the really meaningful jazz playing and encour-



agement from great musicians. Joe Zawinul used to come in and hear the band a lot, and he said, "Cannonball talks about you all the time!" And I'd say, "Oh God, Joe." And then another time, like I said sometimes I got really lucky. I'm not kidding, and I'd play way over my head or something, and after that's where Thad asks me to take a bow, so I'm taking a bow . . . that's another thing, taking a bow, I was very embarrassed taking a bow. Until we went to Japan, and I saw everybody bowing, so from then on I was okay taking a bow. So one time at the end he said, "Dodge take a bow," and I'm taking a bow and I hear this rough voice from back around the third trombone chair and there's a guy sitting against the banquette there, and he says, "Hey you, alto player. Hey you!" And I turn around and it's Coleman Hawkins. And he says, "You keep that shit up and I'm gonna have to go home and get my saxophone." So then Jerome says, "Do you have any idea what a compliment that is?" And I said, "I sure do. So what do I do now?" It cracked him up, and he couldn't stop laughing. I loved to crack him up, it was so much fun. Anyway, those are the things I remember from the Vanguard — especially about what I learned and what helped me to develop. I had to perform in front of really well-known musicians that I'd always looked up to. And I found that not to be so difficult. Playing in front of my peers would be a little more difficult, 'cause I'm not feeling encouragement all the time, I'm feeling criticism, do you know what I mean? So it was an unbelievable experience for me. Naturally, I was absorbing some self-confidence along the way. And that would be the answer to the question of how it helped my career: it helped me to develop, just being in the band.

And the longer I stayed there the more confident I became. So I wasn't going anywhere. So even when all the original guys were almost all gone, I still stayed in the band because of that. I did get to play with Dizzy on three tours. And it was like Phil Woods says, "With Dizzy, school is always open." And Dizzy was that way. You felt like it was a music lesson. Every time you got to play. And with Thad it was that way, it was like there was so much to learn all the time that I didn't consider leaving to go to something else. There was nothing that would have been more enjoyable for me that I could think of. And especially, Thad had a way of encouraging people. And he encouraged me to write, which was developing me in other ways than I had the nerve to try. So to answer your question, I think it was just being there and experiencing. I was growing when I was in that band. I would say it that way. A notable growth in my self-confidence, and my writing and my playing and everything.

Thad had a way of encouraging people that was magical. For example, Quentin Jackson lived just about four blocks away from the Vanguard, and he came in one night, came into the kitchen. Of course he gets a big welcome from Thad and everybody. And I knew him because we played together in the house bands at some of the hotels and stuff, we played for acts and stuff. And Thad said, "Butter, you been playing?" He says, "Oh no, Thad, I had a stroke." You could see one side of his lip was sort of hanging down. And they talked for a while and Thad says, "Butter, you know what, why don't you do this? Why don't you play your horn for a little bit every day for a couple of weeks and then come down and sit in with us and play one tune on the third trombone chair?" He says, "Really?" And Thad says, "Yeah, why don't you try that?" Thad has a way of, when he's encouraging you, well the way I see it anyway, when he encouraged me I would pull up everything I got to try to please him.

So a couple of weeks later, Butter does come down and he says, "You know, Thad, I've been playing a little every day and I can almost play, you know?" So Thad said, "Well, come on and play one song." So he played one on the third trombone chair. And then Thad says, "Okay Butter, come back next week." So he came back next week and played two tunes, and the next week came back and played three tunes. And pretty soon he was playing in the band. He brought Butter back to life. Butter went to Japan with us, he went to Russia with us. And his plunger playing brought delight to people every place we played. It was amazing. We played for a high school on the way back from Japan or something and the kids had never heard a plunger trombone live and it was like, "Wow!" This was surprising, full of surprises, which was the way Thad played. He played with surprises.

We must have played Brookmeyer's arrangement of "Willow Weep For Me" at least 150 or more times and he played the melody on it. He never played the melody the same way twice, ever. I remember the ending of one thing, the ending chord was like a suspended chord in the key of G maybe, a low F with a C-minor 7th or something on top, he plays a small cadenza, and he plays "Yellow Rose of Texas," which is about as far-reaching as you would ever think of for the last chord of "Willow Weep For Me," but it was music. When he did it, it was music. He could do things that were unbelievable.

And I just doubled up when I heard that, and Pepper was convulsing. I mean, Pepper knew him longer than anybody, so it was just great.

I know that Mel briefly played with Dizzy — in '61 I think, just did one tour — but it changed his life. Did Dizzy ever come and check out the band?

Oh sure! He was there a lot and he sat in with us many times. And one time when Thad had to take off — he was someplace and couldn't be there — he sent Dizzy; then I was sort of the in-band conductor. So I was the link from Dizzy to the band. It was very interesting stuff. We were going to play "Three and One," which is one of Thad's songs. And he looks at the trumpet part and says, "I see the melody, but how about these chord changes. Is this concert or trumpet?" I looked and said, "Well, it's trumpet key." And he says, "Oh, I'm in trouble. I don't play transposed chords, I play concert chords." I said, "Oh." And Roland was playing with the band then, and I said, "Roland, do you need your piano part on this?" He says, "No." So I got him the piano sheet, the one page that had all the changes for the solos, and he said, "Oh, thank you!" It was little things like that. And then I found out that there are a lot of people who don't play transposed chords. Pepper Adams doesn't play transposed chords. Every time an arrangement came in with transposed chords on Pepper's part, he'd cross them out and put in the concert keys. A lot of the old-timers, they would like to see the solo chords in concert. It's amazing how many people learned that way. So when you're first learning it, it sticks with you I guess, you know.

What would Dizzy play on?

Well he didn't sit with the band, he sat out front where Thad was. So if he and Thad were there together they were both out in front of the band. And when Thad was gone it was just Dizzy in front of the band, but he wasn't leading the band because he didn't know the arrangements that well, but he would play solos and stuff. And he'd look at me to see how long to solo or whatever. So it put me in a position of responsibility that I would have never thought that I'd be prepared for. In front of my favorite band, with Dizzy Gillespie as a soloist. I would never have imagined this in a hundred years. But I mean there were situations like that that came along. And that also answers that other question about what did I notice about my own development from being in the band. It was rewarding, it was always rewarding in some way. It was one learning experience to another, non-stop. That's what it was.

I know that Ron Carter played with the band a lot, and Chick Corea would sit in. Everybody who's sort of like the name guy now, played in that band, and that gets forgotten about sometimes. Seems like everybody can play with you guys.

Zev Feldman: Lee Morgan!

Yeah, and how about the piano players! I mean all the piano players who sat in — Erroll Garner, Oscar Peterson, all these guys. Everybody played. That's really amazing. And Thad could handle it. Thad was never inhibited by any other musician, whoever it was. Dizzy or any of these piano players, he was

never inhibited by one. But there was one person in the audience once he respected so much that he was off of his . . . he was visibly — he says, “Oh God, what do we play now?” And I’ll tell you who it was. Roland Hanna had a studio in an apartment building that had lots of musical studios in it. And Leontyne Price had a studio in that building and he got to know her from meeting her in the elevator. And Leontyne Price was one of Thad’s favorite operatic singers. And Thad loved Puccini. And I asked him, “Why Puccini?” And he said, “All those melodies! There’s lots of melodies going on at the same time.” And that was kind of an eye-opener into Thad’s stuff. ‘Cause when Thad writes arrangements, sometimes you see a Duke Ellington influence there. But this stuff going on, it’s different, different stuff happening at the same time. Which Puccini did a lot. And of course Leontyne Price’s rendition of “Madame Butterfly” or any of those selections, I’ve never listened to so much at his house one night and he loved it. He really loved that music. He had such admiration for her, it was so funny, when he would clasp his hands in front of himself when he’s trying to think of something to play, he says, “Oh God, what will we play now,” when he found out she was there. That’s the only time I ever saw him even slightly inhibited about somebody else.

Miles used to come in a lot. Miles came in one time, around to the corner, and said something to Pepper. And we were just coming to the end of a song and Pepper says, “Hey Thad!” And Thad says, “Yeah.” He says, “Miles wants to ask you something.” So he says, “Hey Miles, how you doing?” And Miles says, “Hey Thad, can you play a ballad for me?” He said, “Oh sure!” So Miles goes back to his seat at the bar, and Thad calls up number nine, which is . . . [SINGS LOUD, FAST NOTES] really loud and fast. And then right after it he plays his arrangement of “Come Sunday,” that he did for Joe Williams. And he would only play it as a feature for the flugelhorn. And he played that so beautifully. But typical Jones in a way, when you ask him a direct question, he doesn’t answer it directly. He answers it around the corner or something. For example, sometimes he’s to the band and says, “What’ll we play now?” So he’s asking the band to make suggestions. So Jerome says, “How about number 72?” And he says, “Good idea, let’s play 169.” [LAUGHS] So he asks a question, but he already has his own answer ready, and then when somebody gives the answer it’s the wrong one, we go with him anyway. It was great. Moments like that are hard to describe to somebody else. The answer is: “You had to be there.” That’s the only way to really understand it.

And Mel. Mel was so important. Without Mel it couldn’t have happened. It just could not have happened. And I knew Mel, but I didn’t know Mel to be that flexible. But with Thad he was flexible. Because he loved the music. Mel grew in his acceptance of stuff, and his flexibility grew. We were all growing in that band. Thad was growing as a conductor. For example, there was a New York bass player named David Perlman, anyway he played with some jazz groups, he played with Gene Krupa Quartet and stuff, but he was also a classical bass player and he auditioned for the Cleveland Orchestra, which was very prominent in those days. And eventually became the principal bassist in the Cleveland Orchestra. And the Cleveland Orchestra came to New York two or three times a year to play at Carnegie Hall. So whenever

he was in town on a Monday, he would come down to the Vanguard and he would bring the conductor — whoever the conductor happened to be. And I saw him there with the conductors a couple of times, and one time I stopped and talked to him and asked him, “How you doing?” because I made a couple of jam sessions with him playing at Marshall Brown’s or some place. And he said, “You know, I bring these conductors down to hear the band . . .” And I said, “Well, how do they like it?” And he says, “You know what’s amazing? They all see Thad conducting, and they say ‘This is amazing. Fantastic.’” I said, “What do you mean?” And he says, “They all say practically the same thing, same words almost. They say ‘It’s obvious he’s never studied conducting, but he’s in total charge of the music.’” That’s something the conductors, they all envied that. That’s what they all want to be able to do. And he, who has never studied one moment of conducting, has it! It’s a gift, you know. I thought that was very interesting. So it just proved that Thad himself was growing, cause when we started he’d never had that much conducting experience. But he could do it, he could just do it.

MARV “DOC” HOLLADAY SPEAKS WITH ZEV FELDMAN

Zev Feldman: Who hired you exactly for the band and why do you think they chose you?

Marv Holladay: Well, I was an original member when they put together the rehearsal band at the A&R Studios in Manhattan. Thad and Mel had decided to start a rehearsal band that would meet after midnight at A&R. And the first call for the baritone that Thad made was to Pepper of course, with good reason. Anyhow, Pepper told him, “Look, I’m not interested in playing with a big band, I never have been. I like working with small groups,” and so forth. And he said, “But Marv Holladay is here. Why don’t you hire him?” So I get the call I don’t remember if it was Thad or Mel, but one of them called and asked me if I would join them at the rehearsal and that’s what I did. We started as a rehearsal band in the A&R Studios.

Tell me about your first impressions of Mel’s drumming in the band.

You know, Mel was rock solid. I worked with drummers that I felt were more expressive and more musical than Mel — well he’s gone so it doesn’t really matter I guess — but he was rock solid. Mel was one of those guys the you couldn’t move with a stick of dynamite. He would not move. Once he locked in the time, that’s where it was. And that was Mel’s strength. He was a solid timekeeper. We had a few of the drummers, including Thad’s brother, came in and sat in with the band one night, that gave it a lot more lift than Mel.

When did that happen?

One night at the Vanguard. Mel had something else that he was forced to do or he was sick. I don’t know which it was. But I do know that Elvin was there, and I’ll tell you a story about that. Elvin was a bit smashed. And we started the gig and we didn’t play very long and Thad took a break and said, “Okay fellas, that’s it. Let’s take a break.” He took Elvin into the kitchen and got a pot of coffee and said, “Drink it!” He got in Elvin’s face — well he’s the

bigger brother — and he said, “Elvin, you’re embarrassing me and you’re embarrassing the family! Drink this and get sober because I want you on that bandstand playing!”

Was this when Hank was playing piano still?

I think when Elvin joined us Hank was no longer in the band.

Oh, that would have been something, having all three of the brothers.

Yeah, that would have been delightful. ‘Cause Hank was still the grandfather of the clan.

How much musical direction did Thad and Mel give the band in rehearsals?

Mel did nothing, hardly. He left that to Thad. Because Thad was the guy who could tell the band what he wanted. And he did, you know. Usually it wasn’t much. Because when you’ve got Jerome Richardson and Jerry Dodgion and Joe Farrell and Eddie Daniels and myself in the saxophone section, you don’t lead the guys really; you don’t say much of anything. You don’t need to.

What do you remember from the February 7, 1966 opening night?

Oh, the first night, that was a nice night. We went down to the Vanguard and we got there, we set up, we played, we had a great time. It was like having the rehearsal band on a Monday night, which was how we did Monday nights at the A&R Studios at midnight. The only difference about this was we had to go all the way to the Village. We got to the Vanguard around nine o’clock, and started playing around 9:30. And we had a pretty good house; it was obviously well-received. But the next Monday night — the second Monday night — is the story I want to tell you. Jerome Richardson and I lived near each other on the west side of Manhattan. And it was raining. So we talked to each other and decided rather than take a subway and walk in the rain to get to the club, we would go together in a taxi and split the cost of a taxi. So we got in the taxi and we went down to the Vanguard. We pulled up in front of the Vanguard and we couldn’t believe what we were looking at. There was a line, in both directions from the doorway. And you know how small that doorway was. Both directions, up the street and down and around the corner, was a line of people waiting to get in to see the band. The second night we were there. No advertisement. What there was on the door said “Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra” — a small piece of paper that someone had just written with the names of everybody. So anyway, we got out of the taxi and had to wiggle our way down through the crowd because they were all the way down the stairs waiting to get in. And a lot of the guys we were seeing waiting out front in the rain were musicians in town that we knew. And we said hello and so forth. We were kinda pleased to see them. And we went on down and got ready. And we knew. From that night on it was a success.

And the story of what Max Gordon [the owner of the Village Vanguard] and Mel and Thad agreed on? I think it was the second night we were there. Well, Max was no fool, he saw what was going on. And he said, “Look

fellas, I'll tell you what. I love what you're doing. I'm so excited about what you're doing I want to help you guys keep this going. So what I'm gonna do is I'm gonna give everybody in the band 20 dollars every night. Is that okay? I just don't want to take a chance on this not continuing, because I really believe in what you're doing. So 20 dollars a man is what I'm gonna pay you every night." And they said "Okay, well, we'll do it." And to make a long story short, from the second night on that place was packed! All the people paying money, the bar was hopping. Max was making a fortune off of that band. And paid us 20 dollars a man.

Which was pretty good back then, right? Was it good?

Eh, no, it wasn't. We were still accustomed to making a hundred on most gigs at that time. 20 dollars was pretty cheap, but we didn't really care because it took care of our taxi fare getting there or whatever, maybe get us a nice dinner afterwards. So we agreed to that, well, I should say, they agreed and they told us what they were going to do and we said "Fine, it's cool with us. We just want to play."

What was the feeling, the vibe of the Jones/Lewis band and your fellow band members at the Vanguard on the opening night? Can you describe it?

That night, and every night that went thereafter, we had exactly the same feeling as the rehearsal band at the A&R Studios. The music was what we all were there for. That's something that's disappearing for me in all that you see in the States these days. We were always excited. And as a matter of fact, "The Little Pixie" — the tune we sight-read on these records — on the solos that you hear, a lot of the backgrounds that you hear that the ensemble was playing were all head things happening at that moment. And they were hardly ever played the same way twice. But that band was able to — and frequently did — improvise backgrounds behind soloists as a support to what the soloist was doing. It was that kind of musical elevation — the elevation of the spirit of the music — that everybody was about. There was not a soul in that band who didn't have the same feeling about what they were doing. It was all about making that music as great as we could possibly do. And everybody was always laughing and yelling and carrying on.

You hear that on the track "Back Bone," with you guys cheering each other on.

Exactly!

I love the studio recordings that came later in 1966, but they don't capture that kind of spirit that I think these recordings have. Do you feel that way too?

Any time you go into the recording studio, the engineer says, "Well, that was okay, but . . . let's do it again." That's a part of the recording industry; always has been. But this is live. These things that you got here are live and this is the way we reacted. All of us.

I've gotta go back and listen for that now! So we talked about the band on the bandstand, can you talk about the crowd now? How



Mel Lewis, Richard Davis. © Raymond Ross Archives/CISU

did the crowds respond to this music you played in the first several months you guys played the Vanguard.

I can tell you this: The audience was so respectful, and just were awed by what they were hearing. We were awed by what we were doing! Everybody, including musicians, were awed every night as we played. I'm serious. I really think that all of us would have done that gig for nothing, anyhow, because the music was so fulfilling; seriously fulfilling.

Do you remember any specific people coming down to check out the band?

Oh lord, half the music business! Half of the guys you worked record dates with. The place was full of musicians. We were amazed that they came down in the rain to come down to hear us.

When Thad and Mel saw the success of the band, did they form any sort of plan for performing other than just at the Vanguard. Did they start speaking of touring and going on the road?

Well they did tour some, but it was usually isolated tours. It wasn't a thing where you were taking the band out on the road like we did with the Basie band or the Ellington band or any of those other bands. They did tours. They went to Russia one time.

How was it you left the band?

Let me close off my association there the best I can. I was getting very sick of going into the recording sessions and playing crap. And I watched

an awful lot of my friends getting ill health behind it, because as soon as they'd take a break they would immediately run downstairs and go to the nearest bar and ask for triples, where the rest of the guys were down the alley immediately, you know, tightening up their head. And they would come back and play: [SINGS] "BOMP, boo-dee BOMP, boo-dee" required no kind of understanding or musical integrity, you just played those notes over and over and over and over again. Until they had enough takes of the band being perfect that they could patch together the singer in the booth with one take that would make the singer sound like they could really sing. And they would go out and become millionaires in the process. And the recordings that we would be called to do were horrible. But the band had to be perfect and we were. Gene Orloff used to contact all the string players, and they did nothing but play whole notes. We had a guitar player sitting in that studio, a great guitar player who was just going "CHIK . . . CHIK . . . CHIK . . ." No chords, just that noise. That drove me nuts! I did not drink at that time. I'd become a Baha'i and quit drinking and quit smoking and doing all that stuff. But I saw what was going on in the business and I wanted out of it. So I was out of New York shortly thereafter. And that summer I went out of town to work and Thad talked Pepper into coming back on the band. But they didn't lose anything by putting Pepper there in place of me.

What were some of your favorite charts in the book and why?

I loved the charts for the music that's on the album. But one that isn't on the album, Jerome Richardson's "Groove Merchant," is a particular favorite of mine. For one thing, it's so much fun. Jerome had a great concept of what those lines were supposed to sound like and playing with Jerome is like playing with myself. Every concept of line that he'd play sounded so natural to me. Well, I was schooled by a good saxophone player out in Denver who was a homeboy of mine. And he'd put me on the case. I had to play the same tempos he played on tenor or baritone. And he was the first guy to introduce me to playing down in the grease on a slow tune. And that was my skill — being able to cop anybody's concept of style immediately. I did that with Harold "Geezil" Minerve over at the Ellington band when Mercer was directing it. And Geezil finally, after almost losing the time, the phrasing he was trying to play to lose me, particularly on "Jeep's Blues," he would just get up there and scream that little thing and then lay way back as he came down that sixteenth-note run and thinking he was going to lose me, but I didn't, I went right up his butt all the way down.

Can you describe Thad's conducting and leading style?

You know, it was great. Thad didn't conduct like the typical orchestral conductor. He conducted you. He conducted the essence of the band. He would reach up and grab the trumpet section and invite them, so to speak. He'd look at the them with the left hand and say "Ahh! Ahh! Ahh! Ahh!" You could see him do these things. And he was a conductor who conducted the music, not the orchestration. That's why Thad was such a good leader. Because he conducted you the same way as if he was going to tell you in rehearsal how he wanted something to feel. That's the way he conducted. He did it without saying a word. He would transmit what he wanted to hear by his actions. He was a great conductor.



What was Mel's role in the band?

His role in the band was to be a stone, unmovable timekeeper. I mean, you know, he did the fills when they should be; he did everything as they should be according to the charts and the way the band was playing. He was good at that. But the big thing that he gave to the band was that anchor. That time anchor for us to play over. We would go all the way over. The time was important because it allowed us — the band — to interpret the music in whatever way we perceived it to be. Whether it was on top of the time . . . it was like we were flying. We were always on top of it; right on top. If we were down in the bucket, watch out! That was one of the greasiest bands I ever worked with. Lay back in the grease and just grovel in it. It was wonderful.

How did the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra differ from other bands of the day like Basie, Ellington and Woody Herman?

Thad was a blend, partially because of his intellect and also because of his spiritual connection. He was a part of the Basie band in the true sense of the word. He and Snooky Young were just prime examples of that Basie band: the time concept, that business of being able to feel what the phrasing should be and how far to push it or how far to pull it back and how to keep the flow of the feeling going. That was something that was his norm. And he wrote with a great deal of influence from Duke Ellington. The whole way that he used saxophone sections reminded me a lot of Duke Ellington. And his ability to use the color of the different instruments in his work — in his writing — was similar and was influenced by both Billy Strayhorn and Duke Ellington. You could hear it in his writing. And I liked to play that way.

Do you think Thad and Mel's group changed the way that big bands performed and how composers wrote for large ensembles?

I wish they had. The problem I'm stating to you here, or I'm going to state to you, is a personal response. That's all it is. But from that point, that was the last big band that really was a musical organization. From that point forward, and even during the time that they were having some great following — and they were getting a lot of tours in Japan, and around the country and in Russia and other places — they were doing good things. Not on a regular basis, but they'd have a tour for a week or two. And all the guys in the band would say, "Oh yeah, I'm on it!" So it was something that everybody in the band wanted to do, because it was the best music they were possibly gonna to get to play. And that went on and on all that time they were still holding forth until the point where the quality of the music that was overtaking the industry was in such decline that everything that music represented back in the day was shoved aside. And it was a decline of the essence of anything musical as we understood it to be musical. It became about what they could generate [groan] the stuff we hear daily is what that became. They guys in the business decided at some point that they would have to compete with rock and roll. Because that was taking over the gigs and the business. So they thought, "Okay, well then how could we still play this music, and still stretch?" That's my definition of what they called fusion. I really think that's why the guys started creating that with big bands and

other bands, this fusion of rock and . . . well, hell we even had a chart in the band that was based on rock and roll. It was one of the first charts that I remember sight-reading on the gig. You know, I bought that chart to teach my college band how to interpret these big band rock charts. Because what Thad told us to do when we worked on it, he said "Look, play your figures as if you're playing double-time." Count eight beats to a bar instead of four. If it's written in four, play it as if it's in eight. Play the lines as if you were playing double-time, but making 'em swing. And then after you get that going, we'll break it down and put it back in that slow four. So it worked.

It has been said that Thad Jones and Mel Lewis unintentionally created a very mixed race and age band, which was significant in 1966. Did this fact ever cross your mind?

No. No. It had nothing to do with race. It had to do with how you could play. It was always about how you could play. Never about what you looked like. That was true with most of the bands. It was true with Duke Ellington; it was true with Basie, but Ellington, good lord! I just saw an article on YouTube about Louie Bellson and Pearl Bailey, 40 years of marriage and happy. Anyhow, Louie was the drummer with Ellington and the fact that the alumni band asked me to come and be the baritone player, well . . . And of course Bill Berry was in the trumpet section. Race had nothing to do with the musicians who could play. The real musicians were not interested in what you looked like. They only wanted to know if you could play and how well you could play. And if you could be comfortable in this style or that style. It was really about your musicianship, nothing about your racial heritage.

If you were to write a paragraph about the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra for a jazz history book, what would you say?

This orchestra was the fulfillment of all the jazz orchestras that went before them — Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Quincy Jones, whoever. They would be the culmination of all these great, classical jazz orchestras — I used to refer to this, by the way, as American indigenous classical music: Jazz. Because it was exactly that. It was a blend. No influence was ignored, all influences were a part of the jazz offering, the jazz expression. Anyhow, that the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra kind of epitomized and culminated all these different influences that went before them. And that was all Thad's doing, because Thad was the guy who created the music. And he put together musicians who understood what this was about without having to lecture them about it. He just simply knew that they could play that way because that's the way they played. So that was what I would say. I would simply say in that really simple term — it was a culmination of the influences of all these other great classical jazz orchestras that went before them, and there's been nothing like it since.

TOM MCINTOSH SPEAKS WITH ZEV FELDMAN

Zev Feldman: Who hired you for the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra?

Tom McIntosh: It was Thad Jones personally.

You didn't play on the opening night, but you were on the recordings from March 21, right?

Right.

Can you tell me about why you think Thad chose you? And what was your relationship with him like?

Well, the truth is, I played with Count Basie for a short time when Thad was in the band. The story is that Count Basie wanted Al Grey. But Al Grey was playing with Dizzy Gillespie. Dizzy had one more job with his band. Count says, "Let me have him, you just have one job." Dizzy says, "This one job is just as important to any one job you have. I'm not letting him go." So then Count called Jimmy Cleveland, who was the premier jazz trombone player in New York. He was first-call. Any time they needed a trombone, they called him. Cleve did not want to go because he was making so much money just freelancing. He asked Count Basie for an enormous amount of money that he thought Count wouldn't pay. But Count says, "Well, okay come on." And just at that moment, I happened to step into Jimmy Cleveland's door. At that time, I was just becoming friends with him. Jimmy says, "Base, I'm not the one you want, the guy you really want just stepped in the door." And Basie said, "Well, so send him."

The next day was a Sunday and they were having rehearsal at Birdland and as soon as I stepped in, Henry Coker and especially Benny Powell, the other two trombone players, looked at Basie and gave me a thumbs up: "This is the guy." So I was in the band and everything was great. The problem was that the first job we had was at Pep's club in Philadelphia and I got sick. I got so sick. I played with them a couple of nights, and Basie loved my playing and noticed that the guys in the band liked me. He felt very good about that. The next thing was that Al Grey showed up and said he's available. And so Count Basie said, "Look, this young kid is doing a good job and all the guys like him. I don't want to hurt him." So Al Grey sat there night after night, dreaming.

And lo and behold, I came down with Spanish flu and Basie sent me to his doctor. They had a command performance for the Queen of England and his doctor said, "If you take that trip, you're not coming back." So that opened the door for Al Grey. Basie told me, "Mac, look, when I come back, I'm going to add another trombone player. You got the job." So I felt very good.

Then when Basie came back, I was playing with James Moody; he had made me the musical director for his band. And that was better; a real jazz situation for me. Basie's straw boss, Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis, came and said, "Bompie," (he called me Bompie). He said, "Come on, Bompie, Basie says come on." So I said, "Hey, tell Basie thanks, but I got something bet-

ter." And so the guy who taught me trombone in the army, I gave him the job. I guy called Frank Oakes.

But that's how Thad Jones got to know me. When he got this band together, he didn't get me initially. But early on, he asked me to come be a part of the band. And, of course, what the band was, was the so-called best players on their instrument in New York at the time. We felt very, very good. And the idea was that we were not gonna play what somebody told us we had to play night after night, we were going to play what we wanted to play. And so that's the way that got started.

Now the most important thing that happened for me on the band was that I had a publishing company that was being handled by my wife. She got ill with cancer and I didn't want to put more stress on her. So I took that pressure away from her and I assigned Bob Brookmeyer's wife to handle the publishing. I had come to meet her. She's a razor-sharp woman, a good musician and one of the best lyricists who ever lived. So I got to know her and turned it over to her. It turns out that Bobby Brookmeyer saw a piece of music I'd written called "Balanced Scales Equal Justice." He was looking at the files of music I was giving her. And he said, "Mac, this piece of music is outstanding!" He said, "Wow, don't treat this like a normal jazz piece. This piece of music that you wrote is worthy of full composition! Treat it as such."

Anyway, I did the best I could. And then we had a rehearsal with it, and everybody liked it. So then the night that we were going to record Bob, who was the first assistant to . . . the co-leader to Thad was Bob Brookmeyer. And Bob used to call Mel Lewis the tailor because he made everything work. And so it got turned around that became Mel Lewis as second man in command. But silently it was always Bob Brookmeyer. He was the silent co-leader. So the night of the recording, Bob told Thad, "Thad you gotta record that piece that Mac wrote." Thad said (and he was annoyed), he said, "No, no, no. Look, this is my band and we're playing my music. Let Mac get his own little band." Bob Brookmeyer got angry and you know, Thad Jones was like a boxer, and Bob Brookmeyer was with him toe to toe, ready to fight. He said, "You know Thad, that piece of music is monumental! And it's in your library. You gotta do it!" I didn't know he had that in him. So Thad says, "Well all right, but I'll tell you what: I'm only gonna give it one shot. We'll do one take and if we don't get it then, it's out." And so every section leader turns to their section and says, "All right, guys, anybody who makes a mistake is gonna meet me in the alley!" And it was the most complicated arrangement I had ever done. It was one of the Solid State Records. Just a little bit later than these recordings.

What was your impression of these new Thad compositions, especially these new pieces that he brought into the band?

For me, Thad was one of the most brilliant musicians to come along on the fronts. His playing was exquisite. He was next to Dizzy Gillespie as the best trumpet player in jazz. And he was an excellent, superb arranger. Bob Brookmeyer had him just a little notch; Bob Brookmeyer was really a superb arranger. And this is why they were really partners, you know. 'Cause Thad



L to R: Cliff Heather, Mel Lewis, Bill Berry, Bob Brookmeyer, Snooky Young, Tom McIntosh, Marvin Stamm, Jimmy Nottingham, Garnett Brown.
© Raymond Ross Archives/CTS/IMAGES

wanted Bob's arrangements. So Bob could arrange freely but nobody else. But the book was superb. There was nothing in there that was a throw-away. Everything was exciting to play over and over. And it was a challenge to the jazz playing of anybody in the band. Eddie Daniels and all those guys — Joe Farrell, Pepper Adams, Jimmy Nottingham, Snooky Young, that was a superb band. They could all play. And the music challenged them to the hilt. So, I have nothing but superlatives to describe all of those musicians; my whole association with them. Then I got a call to come to Hollywood and Thad got Jimmy Knepper to replace me.

Let's go back to the band. Could you talk about the trombone section when you were in the group? We know it varied from the first night. Can you talk to me about the trombone section when you were there? Right at the beginning part in March of 1966?

Bob Brookmeyer was the lead trombone player. I played the second, Garnett Brown played third and Cliff Heather was the bass trombone player. Excellent. I thought it was interesting. All the best players in New York used to come every Monday night to hear us. Miles Davis — he'd be there and glued to every note Thad Jones played.

This was a period of the infancy of the group. When you first joined in March of '66, how did the crowd respond to the music?

The place was packed every Monday night.

Do you have any other memories of the few months of the band's existence?

It was just totally exciting from start to finish. That's all I remember. It was a pleasure to go to work every night, every Monday. That was the thing about it. You didn't play every night with the band. Only Monday night. And Monday night was the off-night for all clubs. And that was the attraction.

And so people loved to have a place to go on the night when there were no other clubs open. And especially this legendary place, you know.

Let me ask you, what were some of your favorite charts in the book, and why?

Oh boy, oh boy. Thad had one called "Mean What You Say." And boy, oh boy. Hank Jones was in the band too. I mean, what a rhythm section. Hank Jones was the piano player and Richard Davis was the bass player. And oh man, Hank Jones was . . . man, oh man. He was *su*-perb! I mean, you knew he was in a class on his own. He and Tommy Flanagan were the best of friends and the greatest competitors. And then, Tommy Flanagan and I became the best of friends. In fact Tommy Flanagan was the one who brought my music to attention. We lived around the corner from each other and we used to do things. We would go to the Apollo, see Duke Ellington and hang out and talk. He saw me when I was just getting started as a composer and arranger. So he would look at my work and say "Man, this is interesting. What are you going to do with that?" Then I moved to California, and this woman comes up to me and says, "Oh you are Tom McIntosh! Tommy Flanagan plays your music all the time." I said, "He does?" And Tommy, by that time, had become a premier jazz pianist.

How would you describe Thad Jones's conducting and leading style?

Oh, it was superb. Superb. He learned from Basie. Basie was one of the best band leaders you ever met. The band would come out and Basie would sit down and the crowd would be there. And Basie would just start noodling at the piano. You thought he was noodling, but what he was really doing was searching for the mood of the crowd. What is the mood of all these people talking over here? And this group over there and he would come up with the mood of the crowd. Then he would decide exactly what piece made that statement. And then he would start playing. Once he started playing the tune, the band knew the book. The section leaders would say, "That's so and so." So they'd get it up on their stands. And then at a strategic moment, Basie would turn to his rhythm section: Freddie Green and the drummer and the bass player. And he'd just nod at 'em, and they would come in. And then a whole new spirit took over the whole thing. And after they played one chorus, the band knew the next chorus to come in and Hipah Pah Padum Pah Pop . . . So Basie lived not by words, but by doing. And Thad did the same thing.

Talk to me about Mel Lewis's role in the band.

Well, Mel knew he was the second fiddle, but that did not bother him because he had great respect for Thad's playing. And they got along beautifully. Mel, you could sense that he felt honored and privileged to be part of the whole thing with Thad as his co-leader. He never, ever came on like his leadership was more important than Thad's. Never.

How would you say the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra differed from other bands of the day, like Basie and Ellington, as an example?

Well, frankly I would have to say not too much. The whole concept of the big band becomes standardized. I think the real change in all of that came with Dizzy Gillespie. People could not afford the big band anymore, so it got smaller. And Dizzy therefore implemented what the big band was all about into a smaller unit. And that was a real change. But all big bands reflected the spirit of the leader. This is why Thad did not want my music played. He wanted his. He wanted the band to reflect his feelings. And his feeling was essentially like Basie's. That was his measure and the way he grew up and became known. So he held on to that.

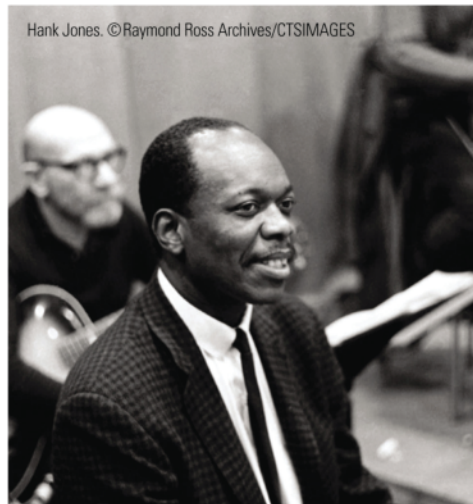
Do you feel Thad and Mel's group changed the way big bands performed and how performers wrote for larger ensembles?

Thad's compositions were more extensive. Basically, the format was: you play the tune. Then you play solos and then there is what we call a shout chorus. And then you take it out. So there are essentially four states. And Thad just simply extended that. He made the shout chorus more like a solo; a band solo. So instead of the sense of a section, you got the sense of the band sounding like one person. He was a master at that.

It has been said that Thad and Mel deliberately created a mixed-race and age band, which was significant in 1966. Was this fact ever brought up or did it ever cross your mind?

No, no, no. The main thing is that being in the band was a joy in every way a musician can expect.

What would you say the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra did for your career? Did it raise your profile?



Hank Jones. ©Raymond Ross Archives/CTS IMAGES

Absolutely, yeah sure! To put that on a resume, that impressed everyone that I ever went to for a job, yeah.

If you were going to write a paragraph for a jazz history book and describe the importance of the Thad Jones Mel Lewis Orchestra. How would you summarize the band and what it meant?

You had the best of all in one. You had the best players out of every band in one band. That was what was truly unique about it. So, everybody felt very, very good about themselves because you were privileged to be in that number.

In closing, is there anything else you wanted to say about Thad and Mel and your memories?

Yeah, I had heard of Mel, but I'd never played with him. The first time I had a job organizing a large band, I hired Thad Jones. I arranged and conducted a James Moody album called *Great Day*. I gave the job of drumming to Tootie Heath and I just told him before, but Tootie forgot about the session. Everybody's sitting there waiting to hit, and no drummer. The studio was next to a club, a hang-out for jazz musicians. So somebody said, "Go down to the club. There's gotta be a drummer in there." And sure enough, Mel Lewis was there. So, I said, "Hey man, I got a gig for you! You ready?" He came on up and did a superb job. *Great Day*. That was the first time I ever played with Mel. Bob Brookmeyer was there and that's when I found out that Bob called Mel the tailor. Because everything he did, he made it fit. He played the drums like Count Basie played the piano. Nothing superfluous. Everything was absolutely right for that particular moment.

I feel fortunate that we have been able to speak with you to document this. This has been great.

And as Dizzy would say, "Don't think that it hasn't, because it has."

JIMMY OWENS SPEAKS WITH ZEV FELDMAN

Zev Feldman: Could you first tell me when and where your musical relationship with Thad and Mel began? And did it come about that you joined the band?

Jimmy Owens: It goes back to the early '60s — maybe '63 or '64 — that I went down to see Thad and Clark Terry with Gerry Mulligan's concert band. And backstage, Clark said to Gerry, "Listen, I can't be here Saturday night. Who should I call to come in and play?" And Gerry said, "I don't know." And Thad said, "Hey man, call Jimmy. He can play the music and read the music and everything." So that's what happened — I went in that night with Clark and read and played all his music and played the solos that Gerry wanted me to play. And I was playing right next to Mel Lewis, who was playing drums with Gerry Mulligan's band. And Thad and Nick Travis were in the trumpet section. And I had known Thad; I met Thad a few times before that. I used to go to Birdland every Christmas during the '60s to see the Basie band. And whenever the Basie band came in, I'd go to Birdland to see them ... if I could get in as a minor. And so that's how I

met Thad and Clark and the rest of the guys in the band. And when Thad and Mel decided to start the band, they were dealing with a lot of younger guys who were on the scene: Eddie Daniels, Joe Farrell, Garnett, myself. So that's how I got the call.

I See.

And we rehearsed, we must have rehearsed for two months, every Monday night at midnight.

Where was the place again? Can you tell us?

At Jim and Andy's bar. Up above the bar, in A & R recording studio. And we would rehearse then. Why it was midnight? Because many of the guys were busy recording all day long. Like Jerome, and Jerry Dodgion was in there, Richard Davis. These guys were recording all day long. So Thad said, "OK, we'll rehearse at midnight. Then we won't have any conflict." So that's what we did. Then Thad came to us maybe seven or eight rehearsals later and said, "Listen, I have an offer from the Village Vanguard to bring the band in on a Monday night. It won't pay very much." And I think he said 15 dollars. Well 15 dollars didn't matter to most of those guys. They were busy working. 15 dollars was 15 dollars. I mean, I was working some too, recording and whatnot.

So we did this. And I remember the first night. Well first of all, at that particular time, 1966, the clubs were in terrible shape. They were opening like Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday and they were closed the rest of the time. Monday was a dark day. That's why Max offered this to Thad. And I remember taking the taxi cab from my house to there. I was living on 19th Street and Park Avenue. And when I got close to 7th Avenue, I said, "What the hell is that, man?" There was a line up the block, up 7th Avenue, past the liquor store and around the corner! And I said, "What the hell is this? At the Vanguard!" So I get out of the cab and I go in. You know, I think I felt bad about going in the front door and walking past all of these people. So I went around to the back, and went in the back door, you know? And I said, "I can't believe all of these people out there!" When they let the people in, the club was packed. And the next Monday night the band played. We played wonderfully. And Max Gordon wanted us the next Monday night. That's how we started on Monday nights. Every Monday night it was packed like that. And Max once told Thad, and I was standing there, he said, "Man, this is great business. You are making my whole nut! Monday night, for the whole week, whoever I bring in for the date coming up." So that was pretty interesting for me to hear that. I was always into business and hearing that from Max Gordon was great.

When you were doing those rehearsals in November '65, did you have any feeling that the band was going to become such a success? You showed up obviously and saw all of these people. Did you have any idea that there were going to be so many people?

I never thought about it. I was shocked. But the band sounded so good.

What was your first impression of Thad's music then? A lot of this was stuff he had proposed playing in the Basie band, which didn't happen. When you saw these charts, what was your impression?

Well, it was different from any of the big bands that were around. You know, you take Duke and Count — they were not playing any music like this. It was like Thad had written music for a small group, only it was for a big band. It was like small group music. It was like what Dizzy did with Gil Fuller back in the '40s. You see? That's what made the music really different. Now I was playing the 4th trumpet part. And man, the stuff that Thad would write on the part was really, really different from any of the music that I had played with any other bands. There were a lot of duplicate notes, whereas I didn't see that with other bands. Now when I say duplicate notes, I would have to play, say like G-F-E-E-E, you know and go on and play something else which was really different. And then after the first one or two rehearsals, Bobby Brookmeyer brought in his first arrangement — "Saint Louis Blues" or something — and that opened up the whole sound of the band. So different. And everybody loved Bobby's arrangement. He did another song, I think it was called "Willow." And man, that's when it became such a joy to go every Monday night to play this music. So it was basically like a rehearsal band. And Thad was writing music every week and bringing in stuff. I remember Hank Jones's "Ah, That's Freedom" that Hank played piano on. Hank was still in the band, in the rehearsals, and played piano on that. And in the brass choir, man the stuff that Thad had written, it was just so fantastic, from the standpoint of other big bands that were around.

You talked about Thad's charts, let's talk about Mel's drumming on Thad's charts. What was your impression?

Well, Mel was a great big band drummer. He would catch all of the stuff that needed to be caught. He provided a sense of swing with that rhythm section. You know, Roland, Richard Davis, Sam Herman, you know Sam Herman was just playing rhythm guitar, like you had Freddie Green in Basie's band. And Sam Herman was copying the music — he had a copying service.

Can you talk a little bit about how those rehearsals went? As far as the musical direction, what was it like with Thad there? Can you talk about his leadership style during those rehearsals?

Thad was leading the rehearsals. He had written the music and he was rehearsing the music. Now, it didn't take a lot of rehearsal because everybody was a great reader.

What do you remember from February 7th in '66 on the opening night?

I remember the crowd of people lined up outside.

Marv Holladay said the same thing. Anyway, when you listen to these recordings, there's a banter between you guys on stage and a general feeling of excitement that something is going on. How do you describe it? Did you feel that same way as well opening night?

It was a fun time and it was like no other big band that any of us had been in. So that was extra special.

Were there any special guests in attendance that evening for opening night? Who came down?

I don't remember that evening, but every now and then Elvin would come down and Thad would allow Elvin to sit in. Now Elvin didn't read music, but he knew how it sounded. So he would play, and the band would have a whole different feeling from Elvin being on the drums.

Could you explain this again? Marv had talked about this. What were the circumstances of having Elvin be in the band?

He would just come by and be listening to the band and Thad would have him come in sit in.

Let's talk about the trumpet section? Can you talk about the musical qualities that each of you guys in the section brought from your perspective? Who was in that section with you at the time?

Snooky Young, who was in my opinion at the time was the world's greatest lead trumpet player. And at that time, I learned so much by standing next to him. From the left side of the band, in back of Pepper Adams, it was me and Snooky, Jimmy Nottingham, and then on the end nearest Mel Lewis, was Bill Berry. Now Snooky was just a magnificent trumpet player. And I had opportunity of playing and recording with him and Clark from a 1964 record date that Donald Byrd put me on in the trumpet section with Snooky, Clark and myself.

Jimmy Nottingham was one of the funniest people and was a great trumpet player. He could play plunger stuff. When they emptied into Jerome Richardson and Jimmy Nottingham trading phrases and taking fours and they started to speak to each other. Jimmy Nottingham could play with the plunger and make all sorts of sounds, and you'd hear him say, "Fuck you, motherfucker!" with the trumpet, you know? Jerome would say, "What? What did you say?" Playing all like that.

And this was the stuff that really wiped out the audience, they loved this. And every time we'd come into rehearsal, you know, I had a lot of hair on my head, and Jimmy Nottingham used to say, "Give me some hair." 'Cause he had a few strands that he would grease to keep it down over his head. Every time during rehearsal, he would say, "Give me some hair!" So this particular time, I had cut my hair a little bit, and I put it in a jar, a mayonnaise jar, small, about six inches. So he said that to me. And I remember, Pepper Adams was there. I don't know who else was around, but a lot of the other band members were around. And he said, "Give me some hair!" So I reached in my pocket of my jacket and gave him a jar of my hair. Not only did he fall out laughing, but the rest of the guys who were in the band, oh, they loved it. Jimmy Nottingham was a great trumpet player and a wonderful person.

Can you talk a little about who he was and his background?

He was on the CBS staff with Thad playing *The Ed Sullivan Show*. Hank was in the band. He had played with all the big bands and was very, very well respected. He was doing a lot of record dates in the city and whatnot. Like I said, he had come through all of the big bands. You know, Lionel Hampton.

He played with Basie sometimes. And others I heard about — Charlie Barnett, Lucky Millinder, Benny Goodman, Dizzy, Oliver Nelson.

Let's go back to the Vanguard for a second. How did the crowd respond to this music?

You mean like the kind of feeling that the band had? As we went on, Thad started to loosen up about this stuff. The first times we played the music from the beginning to the end. But then Thad started to loosen up things. And later on, when we played "A Child Is Born," one night Thad said to Roland Hanna, who had taken over for Hank Jones on piano, "Hey Roland, give us an introduction." And Roland gave about a four-bar introduction, then he went into "A Child Is Born." And the next week, Thad said, "Hey Roland you start it." And then it was eight bars. And by about the fourth week, Roland was playing a whole concerto that he developed before we'd play "A Child Is Born." It was fantastic!

When Thad and Mel saw the success of the band, did they form any type of plan to do performing other than the Vanguard? Did they speak of touring or going out on the road?

No, he never mentioned that to my knowledge. Not while I was in the band. We were just happy with Monday night. I mean, after awhile, we got a raise, I think to 20 dollars, maybe 25 dollars or something like that.

How would you describe Thad's conducting?

It was very relaxed. He came up with all kinds of new little signs. Like "inter-cut" or "put a background here." And guys would come up with a background. He developed a lot of things — his fist in the air, meant, "OK, take it out." So his whole thing was very, very relaxed. He was a great leader because he had had so much experience with leading all kinds of groups and whatnot. So it was a pleasure.

Can you describe Mel's role in the band?

Well, Mel was a business person, OK? And it was Mel who came up with the fact that we don't want anyone to take off. OK? So, Monday night is sacred — nobody takes off. So that's why I left the band. Because I said, well if I can't take off, I'm not going to stay here and work Monday night and miss this whole experience of being able to go to Japan with Herbie Mann, which I had been offered. So I left the band. Thad never knew why I left the band. And when I came back, I came down to see them. And I said to Mel, "Listen, call Richard Williams. Have Richard Williams take my place; he can read the music and whatnot." So that's what happened. So Richard came into the band and took my place and played with the band for quite some time. And he was replaced with Danny Moore. By the time that Danny Moore was in the band, the band was going to go to California and Danny Moore couldn't make it. So Thad asked me to come back in the band and play. So I went out to California with them. We worked in L.A., and I think we worked in San Francisco . . . Yeah, we did. And it was a wonderful experience. And every time the band played, the excitement just pulled in the audience.

How do you think the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra differed from other bands, bands like Count Basie or Duke Ellington?

It was the music that Thad was writing. The music was so different. That's why Basie didn't like those arrangements that Thad originally wrote for the Basie band because it was so different from what Basie had been playing. So that's why Basie didn't accept those charts and that's what made Thad say, "Hey man, I think I'm going to start a rehearsal band to play this music." Like I said, he was writing small group compositions played by a big band and how he was arranging it made it that much more special.

Do you feel that Thad and Mel's group changed the way that big bands performed and how composers wrote for larger ensembles?

Oh, most definitely! I mean, Bobby Brookmeyer was doing the same thing — he was writing kinds of harmony that you didn't hear in the past big bands. It was really extended harmony, and Bobby was a great composer.

What would you say that the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra did for your career?

Well, a lot of people heard me take solos every Monday night. And I guess I got some write-ups when John S. Wilson reviewed the band, or whoever would review the band, they probably mentioned me. At the time I was not starting my career because I worked with Mingus; I had worked with Hank Crawford, Lionel Hampton, Slide Hampton. So, you know, people were starting to know me. I'm sure that being in the band aided me. It's just unlucky for me that after I left, they got a recording deal and they recorded.

If you were to write a paragraph about the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra for a jazz history book, what would you say?

Well, it was a band made up of world-class musicians who were historically in all other major big bands of the past. Now most of them had settled down in New York and were doing commercial work and this was an outlet for their creativity. You know, Jerome Richardson, Snooky, Jimmy Nottingham, Bobby Brookmeyer. They were heavily into doing jingle recording, record dates and stuff like that. So I would say that about the band. That the music created a kind of excitement within the band that went right out to the audience and the audience felt that excitement. I mean, when we played a shuffle, or by the time that Jerome brought in a song and Thad arranged it, like "Groove Merchant," and when we would play that, the people were excited, elated at the groove that we were getting. All of that. It was a wonderful experience for the band members and for the listening audience. And I think the first record the band did, people who bought that record really felt that excitement that the musicians were projecting.

Do you have any other closing thoughts about your time in the band and the band in general? Is there anything else you'd like to say?

Well, it was a wonderful experience. And I mean, the best part of it was the rehearsals before we started at the Vanguard. Those rehearsals were wonderful times. And funny. So we started at 12:00 am and we'd always end before 3:00 so the guys could go out and get a drink and close up the bars.

Let's talk about George Klabin for a second.

Well, he had the first digital studio in New York. Chris White and myself recorded a couple of songs in his studio, Sound Ideas, on Broadway near 48th Street.

Yeah, it was the old Capitol studios that he took over.

It was fantastic. The sound was great. I don't have that tape anymore. I don't know what happened to it in my moving. I lived on 19th Street and Park Avenue for 41 years and I moved 10 years ago to 19th Street and 5th Avenue. A lot of my cassettes and other things I just did away with in the move. That could have been one that was accidentally done away with.

This release is going to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the band. It'll be 50 years!

You know, I played for the 40th. And I played "Once Around." You know, "Freedom" was the first arrangement that we rehearsed, then "Big Dipper." You know, the writing was so different. The saxophone writing that Thad did; none of the sax players played stuff like that. What I had said about duplicate notes? That's how Thad got his sound when he wrote for ensemble of trumpets or ensemble of trombones. I remember Garnett or somebody said, "Hey man, why don't you write some stuff like that for the trombones?" Because Thad was writing all of this intricate saxophone soli lines. Then Thad came back the next week with something and it was trombones! He was very, very prolific.

And he once told me, I used to get on him about smoking, and he said, "Man, when I'm working, when I'm writing I need one match!" Because he would light the next cigarette from the one that he was smoking! And he would smoke two or three packs a day when he was writing music. I have so many funny stories about me and Thad.

Tell us.

After he moved to Europe, I lost contact with him. Then one time, I understood that he had a big to do about his accident over there.

What was the accident exactly?

Oh, somebody punched him in the mouth, something like that. It really messed up him being able to play for awhile. Next thing, he started to play valve trombone because of his embouchure. He played valve trombone for a long time, then he finally got around to playing cornet. And we met up in Finland at the Pori Jazz Festival.

What year was that, do you remember?

Oh, I can't remember. It was '80 something. One year, I had led the Pori big band with my music and then the next year they had Thad lead the band with his music. So now Thad is playing cornet; he had just been playing cornet for about two or three months. I asked him, "What are you practicing?" He said, "Hey man, I just take a song and play ten or 12 choruses on that song and then go to another song." I said, "You're not doing any exercises?" He said, "No . . . Like what?" So I wrote out a bunch of exercises for him to

improve his chops. Then after Pori, he was living in Denmark, and he was going back home to go to the hospital to have an operation. And I said, "Where's the hospital?" 'cause I had some time after Pori. So he gave me the information about the hospital, and then I went to Denmark. I remember being on the plane with Lockjaw Davis and Sweets and we landed and I stayed in the same hotel they were staying in. And I managed to maneuver and get the train to this hospital outside of Copenhagen. I went to see Thad.

That was a very rewarding time. When I came back home, I received this beautiful letter. Now, it wasn't Thad's handwriting; it must have been his wife's handwriting. Thad wrote on a slant. When you look at his music, it was slanted either to the left or to the right when he was writing something. But this letter was written so beautifully and eloquently. He dictated it to her thanking me for these exercises that really, really helped him get his chops back in shape. Jerry Dodgion has some great stories about Thad because he went to see Thad right before Thad died. Roland Hanna went to see Thad also in Denmark before he died, and I think Jerome went to go see him also. I think all of that smoking finally got to him.

Chris Smith: It was pretty sudden, wasn't it? You heard about him being sick and everybody made the trip because it was sudden?

I was working in a club in Hamburg with a pickup band. And I'm getting ready and it's a pickup band. And the drummer — Alex Riel was playing drums — and I'm getting ready to count off the first song, and he said, "Man, isn't it too bad about Thad?" And I said, "What about Thad?" He said, "He died yesterday." I said, "What?!!!" Oh man, that brought me down for the whole night. That's how he told me.

Zev Feldman: How did you play? You must have been devastated.

It was very, very difficult.

I can't even imagine.



L to R: Eddie Daniels, Mel Lewis, Cliff Heather, Bob Brookmeyer, Bill Berry, Tom McIntosh, Snooky Young. © Raymond Ross Archives/CTSIMAGES



THE 2xHD MASTERING PROCESS



The 2xHD Fusion Mastering System: In the constant evolution of its proprietary mastering process, 2xHD has progressed to a new phase called 2xHD FUSION, integrating the finest analog, with state-of-the-art digital technology.



The mastering chain consists of a selection of high-end vacuum tube equipment. For the recordings on this album, the original 1/4" NagraMaster curve, NAB or CCIR master tapes were played on a Nagra-T tape recorder, modified with high-end tube playback electronics, wired with OCC silver cable from the playback head direct to a Nick Doshi tube head preamplifier. The Nagra T, with its four direct drive motors, two pinch rollers and a tape tension head, has one of the best transports ever made. A custom-built carbon fiber head block and a head damping electronic system permit 2xHD FUSION to obtain a better resolution and 3D imaging.



The resulting signal is then transferred into high resolution formats by recording it in DXD using a custom 2xHD Technologies A to D converter. All analog and digital cables that are used are state-of-the-art Siltech. The 2xHD FUSION mastering system is powered by a super capacitor power supply, using a new technology that lowers the digital noise found in the lowest level of the spectrum. A vacuum tube NAGRA HD DAC X is used as a reference digital playback converter to A and B with the original analog master tape, permitting the fusion of the warmth of analog with the refinement of digital.

2xHD.com
Pure Emotion

thad jones/ mel lewis orchestra

Thad Jones

trumpet, flugelhorn,
arranger, conductor

Hank Jones

piano

Sam Herman

guitar, percussion

Richard Davis

bass

Mel Lewis

drums

SAXOPHONES, CLARINETS, FLUTES**Jerome Richardson**

alto saxophone, clarinet, flute

Jerry Dodgion

alto saxophone, clarinet, flute

Joe Farrell

tenor saxophone, clarinet, flute

Eddie Daniels

tenor saxophone, clarinet

Marv "Doc" Holladay

baritone saxophone

Pepper Adams**TRUMPETS****Jimmy Nottingham****Snooky Young****Jimmy Owens****Bill Berry****Danny Stiles****TROMBONES****Bob Brookmeyer****Garnett Brown****Cliff Heather****Jack Rains****Tom McIntosh**

1 BACK BONE 12:36

2 ALL MY YESTERDAYS 4:29

3 BIG DIPPER 10:56

4 LOVER MAN 5:17

5 AH, THAT'S FREEDOM 7:14

6 WILLOW WEEP FOR ME 5:53

7 POLKA DOTS AND MOONBEAMS 2:44

8 LOW DOWN 4:32

9 BACK BONE Alternative take 5:32

Recorded February 7, and March 21, 1966 by GEORGE KLABIN

Sound restoration: GEORGE KLABIN and FRAN GALA

2xHD Mastering: RENÉ LAFLAMME and ANDRÉ PERRY

Produced for release by ZEV FELDMAN and GEORGE KLABIN

Associate Producer: CHRIS SMITH and JOHN KOENIG

Art direction and design: BURTON YOUNT

Cover Photo: CHUCK STEWART

2xHD Executive Producer: ANDRÉ PERRY

