

# Artist Profiles

## MEL LEWIS

*Mel Lewis*, one of America's greatest musical resources, is poised at the starting blocks of IAJE's New Orleans annual jazz-fest. Aiding and abetting the nonpareil percussionist will be, live and in-person, the 16-strong, world-class *Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra*.

Just back from a highly acclaimed tour of Japan, Lewis and the Orchestra have resumed their fabled Monday night sessions at the Village Vanguard. Lewis has also been garnering critical raves for a trio of recent releases from the audiophile MusicMasters label: a small group setting with members of the band called *Mel Lewis Sextet: The Lost Art*, and two rousing big band dates, *Soft Lights and Hot Music* and *The Definitive Thad Jones: Live from the Village Vanguard*.

The big band dates mark a transition in the band's evolution. "We thought we should do a tribute to Thad. But, as far as I'm concerned, it's now time to move on. We're on our own now. It's time for younger guys, writers like Jim McNeeley and Kenny Werner. Thad is Thad, and will always be important to us. And I'll always play his music. But, it hasn't been his band for ten years. It's been my band."

What can we expect from the Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra? Well, like the

sound-of-surprise essence of jazz itself, the specifics won't be known until Lewis sits down at his kit in New Orleans. "I never know what the program will be," Lewis commented. "I'll run it just like I always run it. Surprise, surprise!"

We can, however, expect big band jazz at the summit of the cutting-edge and a host of exceptionally gifted young players such as saxophonists Dick Oatts, Ted Nash, Gary Smulyan and Joe Lovano, pianist Werner, bassist Irwin and the inimitable, indefatigable Mel Lewis.

—Dr. Chuck Berg

## JON HENDRICKS

Jon Hendricks is perhaps best known through his association with pioneer vocal jazz group, Lambert, Hendricks and Ross (who were noted for setting lyrics to instrumental jazz arrangements.) This technique, called *vocalese*, was closely associated with be-bop and today is practiced by such artists as the Pointer Sisters and many others. Jon's background as a child, which included singing with Art Tatum and Charlie Parker, had a marked influence on the direction of his career. It was Charlie Parker who encouraged Jon to enter into the music field.

Today, Jon Hendricks & Company is still keeping the Lambert, Hendricks and

Ross tradition alive. They will bring this tradition, along with their own original material, to the 17th Annual IAJE International Conference in New Orleans.

The vocal group, which consists of Jon, his wife Judith, daughter Aria and Kevin Firtzgerald Burke will present a new approach to the normal concert we are accustomed to hearing. Although the concert will be performance-oriented, Jon will provide the audience with insight into *vocalese*, what it is, and how it started with Lambert, Hendricks and Ross.

Jon's rhythm section will feature the young talented pianist from Parson's School of Design, Larry Goldings. Other supporting cast members in the rhythm section are Andy McCloud, bass and Clifford Barbaro, drums.

In addition to providing us insight into *vocalese*, Jon will give us some information about a new album that is set for a March, 1990, release. He is the producer of one of the most eclectic albums produced this past decade. *Jon Hendricks and Friends* will feature Al Jarreau, George Benson, Bobby McFerrin, Manhattan Transfer, the Count Basie Orchestra, Wynton and Branford Marsallis and, of course, Jon Hendricks and Company. Jon has promised to give us a teaser of a few tunes on the concert.

—Gene Aitken

Mel Lewis



Jon Hendricks



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## ELLIS MARSALIS

Ellis Marsalis was born and raised in New Orleans and is the noted patriarch of one of the most famous families in jazz. Of his six sons, the three oldest ones — Branford, Wynton and Delfeayo have already made numerous significant contributions to the music's growth and development.

The senior Marsalis' first jazz improvisational experience came as a young tenor saxophonist playing in the Gilbert Academy swing band. His attention was concurrently directed to jazz piano and bebop as a consequent impact of Oscar Peterson, Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie while he was engaged in formal study of European music at Dillard University in New Orleans as a music education major.

After a series of experiences as a jazz pianist and a jazz educator, he spent eleven years on the faculty of the Arts High School — The New Orleans Center for Creative Arts. In 1986, he served as the Coordinator of Jazz Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia.

Following his three-year stint in Virginia, Marsalis returned to his home city in the fall of 1989; he is currently the Director of Jazz Studies at the University of New Orleans.

In anticipation of Marsalis' clinic at the IAJE Conference, which will include insightful points of view, philosophical concepts and specific techniques of jazz improvisation, here are samplings of his thoughts:

On improvisation; "I'll probably illustrate it on a simplistic level — improv as it relates to learning language so that it's clear it's not a mysterious thing or that 'it just drops out of the sky!'. I've learned that the problems occur either when you set expectations too high for those who can't meet them or . . . you think (wish) that the simplistic aspect of it is something anyone can do without realizing there is often a gross amount of trauma with improv." —Dr. Herb Wong

## NEW YORK VOICES

One of the most exciting vocal jazz groups to emerge in the past ten years is the New York Voices. The group's first album, *New York Voices*, has been released by GRP and is doing quite well according to Darmon Meader, spokesperson for the group. The New York Voices has just completed a tour of Europe and Japan and its members are now touring in the United States.

Before coming to New York, four of the singers and the pianist attended Ithaca College where they performed in

the Ithaca Vocal Jazz Choir under the direction of Dave Riley. It was through an Ithaca alumni vocal jazz tour of Europe that these singers met and formed the nucleus of the ensemble. The singers are Peter Eldridge, Caprice Fox, Sara Krieger, Darmon Meader and Kim Nazarian, all of whom, except for Sara, are from Ithaca.

Dave Riley remembers that when they were in college, all the students had several things in common. They had very strong outgoing personalities, were great musicians and had incredible drive. And, they were always practicing! Singing and playing new music was important to them.

The appearance of the New York Voices at the IAJE International Conference may open another market they can explore . . . the college and high school vocal jazz festival and clinic circuit. (This has been true for many new vocal jazz groups who have performed at IAJE.)

For the New York Voices, the music comes first. Although they do no choreography, their live performance is very visual and dynamic. We also can expect Peter Eldridge to do some extra work on keyboards and Darmon to provide us with sounds of the tenor sax and EWI.

—Gene Aitken

Ellis Marsalis



New York Voices

