

The following is a longer version of an interview that first appeared in the October 2018 issue of *Allegro*, the magazine of AFM Local 802. For more background, see [www.Local802afm.org](http://www.Local802afm.org).

### Feature Interview

## ‘IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL TIME’

Local 802 member **Ed Xiques** remembers his years with the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Orchestra...and much more



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*“Thad says you got the gig.”*

**‘THAD SAYS YOU** got the gig.’ Those were some of the sweetest words I ever heard. I just lucked out, really. The band was loaded with fantastic players, and it was the one band that I had the feeling I’d love to play with at some point.”

So says saxophonist Edward Fabian Xiques Jr. as he remembers his time with the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Orchestra, his musical influences, and his career as a musician,

composer and educator. Ed performed with Thad and Mel from 1971-1978 at The Village Vanguard on their famous Monday night shows. He also played on many recordings, and went on the road with them in Europe and Japan.

I became fascinated with the music of Thad Jones thanks to the infectious enthusiasm of Local 802 member Tim Newman, a professor at William Paterson University. I was a grad student there, and ended up writing “Electric Thad: Thad Jones and His Use of Electric Instruments and Rock Styles in the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Orchestra.” (Another connection: Thad and Mel taught at William Paterson years earlier, and Thad was the first ever director of jazz studies there.)

I already knew Ed’s playing and composing with Diane Moser’s Composers Big Band, and was excited to spend time talking to Ed, who’s been a member of Local 802 since 1963. He turns 79 on October 9<sup>th</sup>, so happy birthday, Ed!

Ed’s last name comes from his father’s Cuban heritage and is pronounced Hickus (with the emphasis on the first syllable). His father also has Irish roots, and his mother’s side is Scottish.

**Linda Miksza:** How did the gig with the Thad Jones-Mel-Lewis Orchestra come about?

**Ed Xiques:** Jerry Dodgion called and asked me to come in and sub on baritone sax for Pepper Adams. After I believe the fourth Monday night Jerry said, ‘Thanks man. Pepper’s coming back next week.’ I said, ‘Okay great, and if you need a sub somewhere else, just let me know.’ So then Jerry said, ‘Come in on alto next week.’ On every gig I did, I noticed there were different alto players. This went on for another month, and then Jerry said, ‘Thad says you got the gig.’ I heard Thad’s band on the car radio and had been down to see the band at the Vanguard once or twice. That was the one band I really wanted to experience, so I really was lucky.

**Miksza:** So you were familiar with the music before you got involved?

**Xiques:** Not intimately. I never played any of the music before, but I certainly was aware of the band. The music was so powerful, so unique.

**Miksza:** What was it about the sound of the band that grabbed you?

**Xiques:** I would say Thad’s writing. And Mel’s drumming. I had been a fan of both of them. When I was in high school in the fifties, I used to go to Sunday afternoon concerts at the Glen Island Casino in New Rochelle, New York. I lived in Pelham, which was about ten minutes away. And Basie’s band was at Birdland in Manhattan, twenty-two weeks out of the year at that time. I used to go down to Birdland, and go to the Sunday afternoon concerts and hear Basie, Louis Armstrong, Omer Simeon, and a bunch of great players. So I heard Basie’s band a lot, and Thad (*Ed puts his hand up to his mouth and wiggles his fingers, as though playing a trumpet*) was in the trumpet section. I was just waiting for him to play a solo! He was such an incredible, inventive soloist. And Joe Newman was in the band, and as I recall, took most of the trumpet solos. He was great too.

*The phone rings at the jazz club Trumpets, in Montclair, New Jersey where we are. Ed gestures and says, “I’m not here.” (We laugh.)*

So, to me it was a very special moment when Thad would play a solo because he was going places harmonically and melodically. I never did get over that I was playing with him every night. He was doing incredible, innovative things.

We'd always play *A Child Is Born*. It opened up with Roland Hanna playing piano, another exciting and inventive musician. Sometimes he'd be Ravel or Debussy, another night Bartok. That's how he seemed to me. He would start off with a whole different bag than the last time he did it. It was an adventure every time. And then Thad would play his amazing solos. I was a fan of Mel's too. In high school, my friend Ted Pease, who was a drummer, used to listen to those Stan Kenton records that Mel was on. And the "Contemporary Concepts" album with Charlie Mariano, one of my favorite alto players, and I think Al Porcino was on those records, who later played trumpet with Thad and Mel's band quite a bit. I thought that was the best band Kenton had, when Mel was playing drums, with Charlie Mariano on alto sax, along with Stu Williamson and Al Porcino on trumpet.

*“ With Mel playing the drums, it was like riding  
in a Rolls Royce.”*

So Mel (*Now Ed moves his hands as though playing drums*)...I always loved Mel's playing. It was so smooth and just so musical and tasteful, not overbearing at all. Everything was perfectly set up and the phrases were so beautiful. Some drummers are much more aggressive. He never tried to take over, which made him so easy to play with. I remember the first night I played with the band, on baritone, I'm sitting way over in the corner, behind the post, at the Vanguard, Mel is right there! From the first tune, the way it felt—and I was familiar with his playing—but to actually be playing in the band, with him playing the drums, was unbelievable. To me it felt like riding in a Rolls Royce, as opposed to a Chevy or something. It felt so perfect.

And I was nervous for years playing in their band. Yeah! Especially if I had to stand up and take a solo. It wasn't that often, because everybody was such a great soloist.

**Miksza:** How often *did* you get to play solos?

**Xiques:** Well...on *Tiptoe*, on *Intimacy of the Blues* composed by Billy Strayhorn -a few solos. But the band was loaded with great soloists like Jimmy Knepper, Pepper Adams, Quentin Jackson, Jerry Dodgion and Billy Harper and Gregory Herbert.

**Miksza:** Did you have any favorite gigs that you can remember, or favorite sessions?

**Xiques:** I guess what comes to mind is when we played in Munich, Germany at a club called the Domicile. When we first played there, the Domicile was located about a block from Leopoldstrasse, which is a main drag in Schwabing, a section of Munich. It was fairly small, and the place was jam-packed with people. The gigs there were great. We could settle in, it was comfortable, and we played there about a week. After a while the club moved, right *on* Leopoldstrasse, and it was a larger club. One summer we were in Europe for four months, and that club was our home base. We went to Cologne, and once to Spain. We did different gigs in Europe, but then we'd come back to Munich and play there. And that's where we did the *Live In Munich* album.

**Miksza:** Right... That won a Grammy too.

**Xiques:** Yeah, it won a Grammy! I think that album was Mel's favorite album, with the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Orchestra. The ensemble playing on that album is incredible. We were playing every night. With *those* guys, playing every night! Even once a week was great. After a few gigs in a row, that band was unbelievable.

**Miksza:** A well-oiled machine.

**Xiques:** Yeah... yeah.

**Miksza:** What other countries did you tour, as a member?

**Xiques:** Well all over Europe, in jazz festivals. I remember Perugia in Italy. That was a nice spot. We were in Japan, twice I think, in different cities. I remember a beautiful, old concert hall in Osaka. It was a big wooden stage. I played there with Woody's band too I think, that same place. I remember getting off the train in Kagoshima, and it was the first time I ever saw a live volcano. I get off the train and the volcano is smoking.

**Miksza:** Was that scary?

**Xiques:** No. (*We laugh.*) So we were in Poland, Sweden, Helsinki—we played a couple of times in Helsinki. I lost my original passport. I wish I had that original passport with all those stamps. That would bring back some memories. We traveled all over the place.

**Miksza:** It sounds like you enjoyed traveling.

**Xiques:** I did then. I'm not enjoying it so much now. But there's a lot to be learned from traveling. It's an education.

“Everything Thad did was so special.”

**Miksza:** When you were playing in Thad's band, were you also in Ten Wheel Drive at the same time?

**Xiques:** Yeah, and Bill Watrous's band also. I played with Ten Wheel Drive for a year, and I played with Bill Watrous for maybe a couple of years. I don't think I gave up any Thad gigs to play with somebody else. I made all the Thad and Mel gigs except at the very end when I left the band. That was kind of grueling, because I played a different set of horns on Ten Wheel Drive, so some days I was laden down with stuff. And Ten Wheel Drive rehearsed a lot. It was a good band, but Capital Records never did anything with it. We recorded an album. I thought it was nice. I played mostly tenor on that, and some baritone. I ended up playing solos on soprano, because the band would turn up so loud. I'd bring the soprano so I could go over the top. (*laughs*)

**Miksza:** So you could cut through.

**Xiques:** Yeah!

**Miksza:** That would be considered more of a jazz-rock band stylistically?

**Xiques:** I guess so, yeah. Yeah... yeah. It had a lot more subtleties to it than a rock and roll band. And the singer, Annie Sutton was great. She was the singer when I was on tenor, not Genya Ravan.

**Miksza:** Genya Ravan was later?

**Xiques:**Earlier. They already had a hit, and then the band broke up and they reformed. It was Tom Malone actually who recommended me. It was enjoyable, but it was nothing like playing Thad's music.

**Miksza:**How did it compare?

**Xiques:** It didn't really. It was a totally different thing. Everything Thad did was so special. His melodic senses, his harmonic senses, his ensemble writing.

**Miksza:**What about Bill Watrous's big band, the Manhattan Wildlife Refuge?

**Xiques:**We did two albums, for Columbia.

**Miksza:**Were those mostly Bill's charts?

**Xiques:**No. John La Barbera wrote a bulk of charts. They were good. He was teaching at Ithaca or Cornell for a while. I think now he's somewhere maybe in the Carolinas. But he's a well-known writer. He's got a lot of stuff published. And I think there were some charts by Wayne Andre, the trombone player.

**Miksza:**And Bill played with Thad's band too, once in a while?

**Xiques:**He may have subbed on the band from time to time.

**Miksza:**Did you know him from Thad's band?

**Xiques:**No. I first met Bill when he used to play with Larry Elgart's band, and I did some recording with him. Columbia again. I remember Bill coming down and fronting the band. I guess it was a kind of audition. I had forgotten about this. You're bringing this back. I guess he had an agent, who was thinking of him fronting a big band. I don't think he played any of the gigs per se in the trombone section, but I think that's where I first ran across him. And then a few years later he put his own band together. I don't remember too much about how I happened to get called for that. It was a great band. But again, nothing like Thad and Mel's band and the writing.

**Miksza:**Was it more straight ahead?

**Xiques:**I would say it was more commercial. I think in the big band genre, it didn't have the depth that Thad's band had. What does? Duke Ellington. To go back to when I was in high school, I used to go hear Duke Ellington's band a lot. So to be able to meet some of these guys and play with some of these guys... I went to Boston University, and I was playing with Phil Barboza. It was a Latin band—wow you're really bringing back some memories. *(Laughs)* When I was 19, we played a gig in New Bedford, Massachusetts. Paul Gonsalves is from there, and he came and sat in with us. He played *Body and Soul*. And then I always loved Johnny Hodges, and Harry Carney and the trombone section. Butter was playing—Quentin Jackson (his nick-name was Butter)—was playing in the trombone section. I think the first jazz record I ever bought was *Ellington Uptown*. These were the days of LPs. I had this record player in my room and I would lay on the bed listening to *A Tone Parallel to Harlem*, and Quentin was playing these plunger solos. I'd be laying there and just go out. It was unbelievable. No drugs, just Quentin playing this solo. It was incredible man.

I remember a gig with Thad and Mel in Denver, and we had just recorded *Suite For Pops*. Quentin Jackson was in the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Orchestra at this time. Something happened with the recording of Quentin's trombone solo and we couldn't use it. We had to re-record that one section with his plunger solo, and Janice Robinson ended up playing the solo because Quentin couldn't be there. On the live gig, he and Thad would be out in front of the band and they'd be talking to each other, going back and forth. You could

almost hear words and little remarks, but it was just the plunger. Then Quentin played a solo, a plunger solo. He was such a beautiful player. And the whole audience, of kids, stood up and cheered. He just had that ability to touch people. Like Clark Terry too, who I never played with. I would love to have played with him, but I was always a big fan of his. Just one note from Clark, made you feel great. And you knew who it was too, from just playing one note. And he was in that Duke Ellington period when I'd see the band a lot. There is a version of *Take The "A" Train* on the album, *Ellington Uptown*, with vocalist Betty Roche. You should check that out if you've never heard it. It's like a whole suite of *Take the "A" Train*, and Paul's playing in this as a ballad, and then the tempo doubles, and then it doubles again. There's a version of *Perdido* where Clark Terry plays along and takes a solo. I got sidetracked talking about Duke, because that was one of the few bands that had the depth that Thad's music had...for me.

**Miksza:** Thad has said, that Duke Ellington was a real inspiration to him, writing-wise.

**Xiques:** Yeah. I hear, I think Basie's band was too. Absolutely Duke Ellington.

**Miksza:** As a composer

**Xiques:** and Billy Strayhorn.

**Miksza:** What about *your* composing? The pieces you've performed with Diane Moser's Composers Big Band, of which you are presently a member, are great!

**Xiques:** Thank you.

**Miksza:** Were you writing at the time when you were with Thad and Mel, or did that come later?

**Xiques:** I dabbled in it, and I realize now...I never thought I was going to be a professional musician. I was in a music education program, so I figured I'd be a music teacher. I liked music, I was always curious about writing, and I would always pick guys' brains. I had written a few things, but got into it more seriously when I was around 40, somewhere in there. I never wrote anything with Thad and Mel. Whatever I had written at that point wouldn't stand up against *anything* Thad wrote when he was asleep.

*(Laughter...Ed has been tapping his plastic water cup in rhythm, down and up during this topic).*

**Miksza:** Do you think Thad inspired you?

**Xiques:** Sure, everything he did was an inspiration. Yeah, absolutely. He was a master. He's one of the great composers of any kind.

*"It was a beautiful time."*

**Miksza:** Do you have any stories about your fellow band mates, or any memories of the guys in the saxophone section when you were there? Do you keep in touch with anybody still?

**Xiques:** Well Jerry and I keep in touch-Jerry Dodgion. Somewhat. I see him every once in a while. We're busy, so it's really hard, I find, to get together and socialize because we're always doing something. But out on the road we would hang out together and reminisce. Jerry is one of the most beautiful human beings on the planet. He's a great person, and a wonderful alto player. He's another one. You hear him play a note or two and you know just who it is. That's really special. We used to hang with Pepper too, and Jimmy

Knepper. Pepper and Knepper. They made an album together. (*The Pepper-Knepper Quintet, with Thad's brother Elvin Jones on drums, recorded March 25, 1958.*)

I liked everybody in the band. But some guys hung out, and some guys didn't. We used to hang out after the gig at the Vanguard for a while. Or in Munich at the Domicile, we'd hang out at the club and socialize.

**Miksza:** That must have been pretty late at The Village Vanguard, right?

**Xiques:** Yeah! (*laughing*)

**Miksza:** Because the gig started at ten...

**Xiques:** That's right! (*laughing*)

**Miksza:** And you did three sets...

**Xiques:** Sometimes we'd do the last set at three in the morning. Jerry had just reminded me of it. We'd do a few tunes, and then we'd hang out for another couple of hours. (*Ed is lost in thought.*) It was a beautiful time. Pepper was a very voracious reader. Sometimes we were in another city and we'd go to a museum, and see an art exhibit together. Or one time we were in Chicago, and he called me up in the hotel and he said, "A friend of mine is performing in a play, called *Kennedy's Children*." The author used to come down to the Vanguard. I always get his name wrong. (*The author of the play is Robert Patrick.*) Shelley Winters was in the play too... good actress. So we'd occasionally do things like that.

**Miksza:** Did you go hear other bands?

**Xiques:** We'd be working all night... and we'd finish so late. So I don't recall going to hear other bands, except when we did jazz festivals.

**Miksza:** So when you were hanging out at the Vanguard after hours, what were you doing? Just talking, having a beer?

**Xiques:** Yeah. Having a couple of beers, and just talking about things. I remember George Mraz, had been reading some deep stuff, like P.D. Ouspenski and Gurdjieff that I'd try to read and just glaze over. I asked Pepper one time, "Pepper, have you ever read any Ouspenski?" because I knew he was reading all the time. He said, "No. I fail to see the humor in it." Pepper was funny. Very quiet... observing. And he loved Gilbert and Sullivan. He had that kind of a sense of humor. Puns! He loved puns.

**Miksza:** When you were doing gigs at the Village Vanguard, what people came to see the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Orchestra mostly? Were there a lot of musicians besides all the fans?

**Xiques:** People would come there from all over the world. They still do. There'd be students in town from different places, and well-known musicians would come in. I remember Tom Scott, from LA would come down, a lot of great players... Chick Corea subbed in the band a few times... and Erroll Garner came down to hear the band and sat in... George Shearing sat in. They all came down to hear the band.

**Miksza:** Ray Charles?

**Xiques:** Maybe. I don't remember him being there when I was there, but I'm sure he did come to hear the band. I worked with him a bunch of times, but I don't remember him coming down. Bette Midler... she came down to hear the band, I remember her being there.

**Miksza:** Thad mentioned, in a *Down Beat* interview from the 70s with Arnold Jay Smith, that for the ninth anniversary—and you would have been in the band at the time—that Joni Mitchell was there...

And that she brought champagne and candles and cakes for everybody...  
Do you remember that?

**Xiques:** No, I don't remember that, no. Ninth anniversary, I would've been there. Well, I'm getting old. Maybe I didn't know who Joni Mitchell was at the time.

**Miksza:** She was the girl with the cakes and the champagne.

**Xiques:** (*jokingly*) Oh that one! Yeah! (*We laugh.*)

We had Dee Dee Bridgewater singing with the band. We did a tribute with Jon Faddis, in September I guess it was, 2004 in Chicago. And Jerry Dodgion was there, and George Mraz, Billy Harper, and Dee Dee sang, and sounded great.

Faddis was leading the band. It was a Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Orchestra reunion, with some players from Chicago. Some of the guys who played in the band aren't around anymore, so they filled in with local players. But it was a great band, and it was really nice to see everybody again. Garnett Brown was there. We were there for a few days and got to hang a little bit, have dinner together and stuff like that. It was nice to see George Mraz, because we used to hang too. So that brought back a lot of memories. You could see how well everybody's doing. It was great. Hope it happens again sometime, to play that music.

## THE SATCHEL

*Ed goes into a satchel he brought with him, which ends up being filled with a stack of albums!!! This was very exciting! He pulls out the pile of albums and puts them on the table.*

**Miksza:** It's a goldmine! Are you on all of those?

**Xiques:** No.

*Ed looks through the albums, then puts those down and brings up another pile to the table.*

**Miksza:** Did you always have a set chair or did you switch off?

**Xiques:** Most of the time I was playing 2<sup>nd</sup> alto, but after a while, when Jerry couldn't be there, I would play lead. Occasionally, for a change, I would go back to playing baritone when Pepper wasn't there.

**Miksza:** Did you play bass clarinet on *Suite For Pops*?

**Xiques:** Yeah.

**Miksza:** Do you still play bass clarinet?

**Xiques:** Oh yeah, but it's always leaking. It's a pain. I have two bass clarinets now so I'm going to get it fixed. It's an old Selmer.

*Whenever Ed looks at an album, he puts on his glasses. He is remembering that there were different recording dates for Suite For Pops. He tells the story of his old Karmann*



*Ghia Volkswagen, and how his fan belt broke on the Westside Highway on the way to a 10 o'clock AM recording date. He dumped the car and took all his stuff-his bass clarinet, alto and soprano sax. He thought, "I'll be cool. They never start on time." This one time, he walks into the studio, and everybody's in their seat, ready to go. He walks in "right at 10...man, sweating."*

**Miksza:** I'm looking at that pile of records there. Maybe we can play a little game with the records, like pull one out, and see if anything comes to mind?

**Xiques:** (*smiling, as if he thinks this will be fun*) Oh, okay.

**E**d pulls out *New Life*.

**Miksza:** Now that was a tenth anniversary record.

**Xiques:** You know more than I remember.

**Miksza:** It was supposed to be the second decade of the band.

**Xiques:** Uh huh. It was quite a cast of characters. (*He reads names quietly from the album cover.*) "Greetings and Salutations." That's a great piece. For some of these pieces, Thad wrote big orchestral things, as far as winds go. And we never played them in the club, because we didn't have the tuba, and the French horns and stuff.

**H**e puts that album back, and pulls out *Potpourri*.

**Miksza:** Talk about *that* record.

**Xiques:** Oh yeah, this is the one we did for Philadelphia International. The way I understood it, ...it was requested of Thad that he cover some pop tunes.

**Miksza:** Who requested it? The record company?

**Xiques:** The record company. Yeah. That's the way I understood it anyway. (*Looking over the back of the album cover*) Gamble & Huff, For *The Love Of Money*, and *Living For The City*, Stevie Wonder, and *Don't Worry 'Bout A Thing*, Stevie Wonder. And Thad's charts were great...

**Miksza:** So it still sounded like Thad...

**Xiques:** Yeah! Nice combination, Stevie Wonder and Thad. (*He is reading the back cover.*) *All My Yesterdays* is a beautiful ballad of Thad's. Oh, *Yours and Mine*. And a chart that Jerry Dodgion arranged, *Ambiance*, which is a Marian McPartland tune. *Quiet Lady*... ...At one point, we did a gig in Iowa. Then we came to Chicago, and unloaded the bus, and half the books were missing. They had been left somewhere. They've never shown up. And Thad wrote another chart on *Quiet Lady*, completely different than the original one.

We did an album with Monica Zetterlund over in... maybe either Sweden or Finland. She was a well-known Swedish actress, a friend of Pepper's. Thad had written a chart on it, for the tour, called *The Second Time Around*. And it turned out that it was in the wrong key for her. And Monica said, "What key is this in?" He said, "In Bb." And she said, "I need it in F," or something like that, it was big, like a fourth or a fifth away. So Thad wrote a whole other chart. Completely different.

**Miksza:** Not just transposed, all different...

**Xiques:** Just a totally different thing. Amazing....(*reading*). What else does this spark? We were all wearing dashikis at this time. Roland Hanna didn't show up for the photo, that's why we have a piano stool in his place. (*For the album's back cover photos by Lock Huey*)

**E**d is putting that album down now. He quietly mentions *Live In Munich*, which leads me to the following question.

**Miksza:** So when the band wins a Grammy, each individual member doesn't get a little Grammy?

**Xiques:** We didn't. I wasn't even aware of that. I really didn't know much about the Grammys or anything. I remember going back into the kitchen at the Vanguard, and Mel's sitting back there at Max's (Gordon's) desk, and he kind of matter-of-factly said, "We won a Grammy." And everybody said, (*nonchalantly*) "Oh great." I never really paid attention to what that was all about. I didn't realize the significance of it. So apparently not! I never got anything. I wasn't even sure what it meant.

**Miksza:** So all this time you could have been putting that on your resume...Grammy-winner, Ed Xiques!

**Xiques:** (*Chuckling*) Right.

I think I've been on another record that won a Grammy. I have no idea what it is offhand. I don't even know if it's a jazz record.

**Xiques:** (*reaching for another record*) There's one here with Manuel De Sica, son of a famous film director (*Vittorio De Sica*). We did an album in London with *him*. I remember *that*. There's not much information here...no information. I think Manuel had written almost everything.

Thad kind of saved that record. But most of the stuff was written by Manuel, as I recall. It needed some help, and Thad was great at that. He did what had to be done, you know, change this, do that...To some degree he doctored it up to make it more playable. As I recall, Manuel wasn't that experienced as an orchestrator, as far as ranges go, and what instruments are capable of, where they sound best. I don't know how the record did. I have a copy of it. There's probably a sleeve missing, maybe an insert that goes in there. (*Reaching for another album*) Here's *Live In Munich*. Thad's chart of *Come Sunday* is on this. It's a beauty... And on *Mornin' Reverend*, Gregory Herbert takes a long, beautiful tenor solo as I recall. *Central Park North* is really extended. I thought the solos went on too long on that, in my own opinion. But the ensemble playing, as I said before is incredible. We just played in the Domocile club and the recording studio brought all the equipment in a big truck. They'd run cables in and set up microphones, and the engineer was outside in the truck. The truck was probably sitting out there for a couple of days. I think the sound was sort of like playing in the Vanguard. There was something about that room, it seems to me, that was kind of similar. We got real comfortable playing there.

**Ed Xiques Discography With The Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Orchestra**

**Live In Tokyo (1974)** — Columbia YP-7046-N

**Potpourri (1974)** — Philadelphia International ECPN-48-PH

**Suite For Pops (1975)** — Horizon SP-701

**New Life (1976)** — Horizon SP-707

**TJLMO With Rhoda Scott In New York (1976)** Barclay 90 068

**Thad Jones/Mel Lewis & The Jazz Orchestra  
Meets Manuel De Sica (1976)** — Pausa PR-7012

**Live In Munich (1977)** — Horizon SP-724

**TJLMO With Monica Zetterlund-It Only Happens  
Every Time (1978)** — Inner City IC 1082

**TJ/ML Big Band -New York City, Autumn 1975  
(1995)** — Editoriale Pantheon JCD 11

**TJLMO The Complete Poland Concerts 1979 & 1978  
(2009)** — Gambit 69320

**Thad Jones & Mel Lewis Album Promo  
(Unknown Release Date)** — Poljazz ZSX 637

**E**d puts that album away and is flipping through others. They're on the floor, leaning up against a wall to his left.

I have some here before I was in the band. I have duplications. I just grabbed a bunch...

**Xiques:** Do you have a copy of *Suite For Pops*?  
(hands me a copy) Do you want a copy?

**Miksza:** Thank you very much! Maybe you'll autograph it for me later. [*He did.*]

“When you come down to it, Thad was Thad  
and Mel was Mel, and they're going to do what  
they think is right.”

**Miksza:** With all the rock and roll and funk and fusion that was going on during the 60s and 70s, especially the 70s by that time, how did it *effect* Thad's band, with the use of electric instruments? I know on several occasions Roland Hanna played electric piano.

**Xiques:** Just on the recordings.

Just on *Potpourri*, I think he plays electric piano on that. And maybe even Walter Norris on some of those records. Maybe on *New Life*, there may be some electric piano. But we always used acoustic piano on the live performances.

**Miksza:** How about electric bass?

**Xiques:** Only on the recordings. (*Definitively.*) It was an acoustic band. In live performance.

**Miksza:** And guitar?

**Xiques:** In the original version of the band, there was a guitarist. I forget his name. He wasn't there by the time I was in the band.

**Miksza:** Sam Herman?

**Xiques:** Yeah! Sam Herman. He was a studio player I guess, and a good musician obviously, and possibly a friend of Thad's. But they didn't continue using a guitar. Except on certain recordings. I think I remember David Spinozza being on *New Life*, and Barry Finnerty also on guitar. (*Dave Spinozza was also on Consummation.*)

**Miksza:** It's interesting that the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Orchestra was always an acoustic band live, because some of the recordings are *so* funky and electric, like *Central Park North*.

So how did it feel both ways? As a musician, how did it feel to perform with the electric instruments, and then how did it feel to perform acoustically? Did you have a preference?

**Xiques:** Well, in the context of that band I would have to say, trying to imagine performing live, with an electric bass and the electric piano, I think I would prefer the way we did it, acoustically. Mel didn't like rock and roll. But I thought he had a *great* feel when he played *Central Park North* and some of those funk things. I mean it really felt great.

**Miksza:** He was funky.

**Xiques:** To *me!* He's not a rock and roll drummer. He may not even really have wanted to do that. But he did, and he really got a nice groove going. He was brilliant.

**Miksza:** Do you think it was more *Thad's* thing, as an arranger, wanting to reap some of the benefits of the electric instruments, and what they could do sound-wise in the arrangements?

**Xiques:** You know, I don't know. Maybe so, for the recordings. It may have had something to do with the producer suggesting it. John Snyder in one case, and maybe a couple of other cases...but I could see Thad being up for trying it. But we wouldn't be able to...I think it would be too much...I don't think it would have been worth it to carry an electric piano around, or rent one...

And certainly, I didn't feel any loss, because Mel's feel and whoever was playing bass at the time was always a good bass player. Even on the upright, there's something that I personally like about that acoustic sound. But I'm an *old* guy! I like electric bass too in certain situations, but I never really cared for electric bass with a big band. And I played in a lot of bands, like Bill Watrous's band, and I guess it depends on the kind of music that particular band is playing.

**Miksza:** Do you remember any reviews, or any public response to the use of electric instruments on the recordings, after having been an acoustic band live?

**Xiques:** I don't recall any remarks either way. It may have happened, but it doesn't mean much any way. When you come down to it. Thad was Thad and Mel was Mel, and they're going to do what they think is right, and they were on the money as far as I'm concerned. Some people objected to, I think, now that you mention it, to possibly doing pop stuff on a record.

**Miksza:** Some of the band members you mean?

**Xiques:** Well, I wasn't thinking of that, but maybe so. Maybe the listening public might have felt that there's no room for pop music in the band. What Thad did with it was great though, and *fun* to play. He wrote some difficult music, but it was always fun to play. It was challenging.

**Miksza:** Did you like the way Thad Jones wrote for saxophone?

**Xiques:** Yeah, very much so. He started writing, after I joined the band, for two sopranos, two tenors and baritone instead of soprano, alto, two tenors and baritone. That was an interesting sound. And the way he'd voice everything was beautiful.

I remember when Thad first brought in the saxophone parts to *Cherry Juice* down to the Vanguard, he said during the break, "let's check out this saxophone soli." On that particular night, I happened to be playing baritone, because Pepper was taking off and I said, "I'll play baritone," or something like that. I don't know who came in on alto.

*(There is no alto part in the score, but it's indicated that an alto sax part could be provided as a 2<sup>nd</sup> soprano sub.)* Have you ever been to the Vanguard? Do you know the back?

When you go back where the kitchen was, the men's room is back there, and the stairs going *up* to get out of the club. So we were behind the bar, putting the music on whatever we could find. And during the break, or before the gig even started, we went over the saxophone soli. And it sounded *great*. Because the tempo was *(snapping his fingers for the tempo)* was somewhere in there, when we recorded it. It wasn't very fast, and it just got faster and faster over the years, and the inner parts were difficult. *(He sings it a bit.)*

Those leaps of 7ths, you know. Ouch! But, great writing...Where did I digress to, from something? You're jogging my mind.

**Miksza:** You said that Thad's music was challenging to play. Any other kinds of specific things that were challenging that he would write, like those big leaps at a fast tempo?

**Xiques:** Well, yeah. He would use repeated notes.

**Miksza:** So a tonguing thing?

**Xiques:** And that's something I don't do. I try to avoid that if at all possible. I used to copy a lot of stuff for Thad, because it gave me an opportunity to study his scores.

Like for that Monica Zetterlund session. He would be writing in one room, and the band would set up in the other room and it was behind schedule. So I'd copy, and go in and give them the charts, and rehearse the band, and run through the stuff we had so far, and then go back, and he'd have more stuff written and I'd copy that. A lot of times he's just thinking vertically. To play repeated notes in a saxophone solo, at a decent tempo, is difficult. And I'll do a thing where I'll even cross voices. I studied with Manny Albam and he didn't really believe in that I don't think. But *I'll* do that, just to make a part more logical. What difference does it make? So it's easier to play. That's the only thing.

**Miksza:** Did anybody complain about that?

**Xiques:** Not to Thad!!! (*Laughing*) I don't think so. I would have. But I don't think I ever did.

**Miksza:** So no whining? No whining to Thad?

**Xiques:** No! No whining. No... How much can you complain to a genius? I mean I guess you could. He'd laugh it off or something probably. That's a good question. I don't know if I ever witnessed any of that. I might have. But he's certainly not going to change it. (*He mimics writing in a score*) Come on...Actually, the lead alto part was the easiest part to play in a lot of his stuff. Those lines were so natural. (*He makes a smooth rolling motion with his hand.*) Those inner parts. Man. But it's a challenge. You know, it sounded great, and it was fun. Fun. Yeah.

“ The enthusiasm and energy Thad radiated was incredible. I never knew anybody more alive than him. He was just having as much fun as a human can have playing music.”

**Miksza:** Is Thad's conducting style something that you can describe?

**Xiques:** (*Nodding his head*) I can't describe it. He was absolutely one of the world's great conductors. And not because he could do this (*conducting patterns*). He never did anything like that. He'd be laughing and saying “Yeah!” and (*motioning to come in*) and he'd go like this (*hands and feet dancing in opposite directions to the beat*). Just grooving in front of the bandstand (*more hand motions and singing*). He'd do stuff like that. Like he's playing the band. He was just having a ball. And the enthusiasm and the *energy* that

he radiated was incredible. It was always astounding. Quite a human being. I never knew anybody more alive than him. Unbelievable.

It was amazing. You didn't believe the energy. There are a couple of tapes, so you can get an idea. The one that comes to mind is the one in black and white with Joe Henderson.

There are some videos apparently of the band, that would be worth checking out. Not that anyone is going to copy what he did. Thad was unique. But that's a wonderful aspect of his being a band leader. An incredible enthusiasm and joy of everybody in the band. He seemed to love the whole band individually and as a whole. He was a very warm loving person, to *us*. He'd make you play 110%. You thought it was grooving hard, and then he'd get up there and do something (*makes a motion with his hand soaring upward*) and it would go to another level.

**Miksz:** That must have been great for the audience also, to see and experience.

**Xiques:** I would imagine so. They would get a little bit of it. He was facing *us*. So he's doing that for us. He's not doing it for the audience. I mean, he's just *doing* it, because that's what he was. Just having as much fun as a human can have playing music.

**Miksz:** It rubbed off on everybody else.

**Xiques:** Yeah. Absolutely. That's why the band sounded the way it did.

**Miksz:** Thad said in an interview (with Les Tomkins) that, "This is the most beautiful bunch of guys that I've ever been associated with in my life." And it sounds like that's what you're describing.

**Xiques:** (*Ed is nodding in agreement.*) Yeah, I think, now that you mention that, if there was a personality thing, no matter how good a player he was—too much of an ego or something, or *whatever*, they probably wouldn't be there. That would play a part. And it was such a high level band, you wouldn't have trouble finding somebody else. A lot of people wanted to play in the band, and never did. They weren't asked. Usually you don't audition for something like that—like Jerry called me up, to come down and play. I would suspect it was important, that Thad and Mel liked everybody in the band.

And they tried to keep it racially mixed. As balanced as possible. Sometimes I think, they felt it was getting too much one way or the other. That was part of their thought too. That was another beautiful aspect. They *met*, when Mel was with Stan Kenton, and Thad was with Basie, around the time when I was in high school. There was some kind of a tour together, or something. Apparently they hit it off and they said then, "Someday we're going to have a band together." And a few years later, they did.

**Miksz:** It sounds as though it was a dream come true for both of them to have that band.

**Xiques:** Yeah, but things change. So after a while, Thad was thinking about leaving. I think he was having some personal problems, and I know before he left they had been talking about it, and Mel was nervous, and didn't want it to happen. And eventually Thad did leave.

**Miksz:** Didn't he quit quite a few times and come back?

**Xiques:** They may have had some arguments like that. Not that I remember. I don't recall ever doing a gig without Thad. Except one time we were in the South, in Mississippi...I forget where it was. I can see there was a college there. Thad got uptight about something. I had a feeling it might've been some racial thing. And he split. That was the only time I remember where we did the gig without him. He went home. It might have been another reason, but something happened.

**Miksza:** So who conducted the band?

**Xiques:** Mel led it. Nobody conducted. Mel counted it off, and we knew the music.

**Miksza:** How did playing with the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Orchestra effect your career as a musician.

**Xiques:** I don't know. I guess it must have helped. I probably became more known I suppose, as a result of that. But I never really thought about it, that it took any turns career-wise. I guess I never thought I had a career. I just was trying to play music!

**Miksza:** Pure. Pure of heart.

**Xiques:** Well, not really. I've done a lot of commercial gigs to survive. You do what you have to do. And it helped my playing. I understand a lot of things...I'm sure it had a positive effect.

**Miksza:** And you met a lot of people.

**Xiques:** Yeah...yeah. It was a great experience.

**Miksza:** Is there anything that you would like to add? Any other aspect?

**Xiques:** For some reason, you ask that question and Jimmy Knepper comes to mind. I wouldn't mind saying how important he was as a trombone player. He was one of those guys that would practice flute sonatas, and flute duets, Bach cello suites, Bach inventions. He didn't practice trombone stuff. And he would bring this on the road, you know, he'd be practicing (*plays air trombone*). He played like a saxophone player. I just thought he was a very important musician. He and Butter (Quentin Jackson)...as soloists, and he should be recognized for the great player and musician that he was. Also, Billy Harper and Gregory Herbert. I'm just thinking of individuals. Gregory was a phenomenal saxophonist. And improviser. The whole thing was such a great experience. A once in a lifetime thing. I feel so lucky to have been able to do that for 8 years. It was wonderful. Thanks for helping me relive it. (*Smiling*)

**Miksza:** Thank you for sharing your memories.

**Xiques:** A pleasure.



**Ed Xiques**, in addition to his work with The Thad Jones- Mel Lewis Orchestra, Manhattan Wildlife Refuge and Ten Wheel Drive, has toured and recorded with Woody



Herman, Frank Foster, McCoy Tyner and Toshiko Akiyoshi among others. He toured regularly as a member of Liza Minelli's backup band, and performed with Diane Moser's Composers Big Band, where he is still active as a composer. Ed has recorded several albums of his own compositions, and was on the woodwind faculty at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York.

**Linda Miksza** is the author of "Electric Thad: Thad Jones and His Use of Electric Instruments and Rock Styles in the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Orchestra," recently published in *Jazz Perspectives*. She is an educator, performer and composer of big band, chamber music, pop songs and musical theater pieces.

**Dennis Connors** is a photographer of portraiture, editorial, corporate, advertising assignments, and personal projects. He is also a filmmaker, and his documentary film, "Breaking Boundaries; the art of Alex Masket," was accepted in over two dozen film festivals and won several awards, including a CINE Golden Eagle.

