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FULL SCHEDULE AND IMAGES

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Feb. 20, 2009

NYC's Vanguard Jazz Orchestra Performs at the Mondavi Center

Davis, Calif.—The **Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts**, UC Davis, presents the **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** on **Friday, March 20**, at **8 p.m.** in **Jackson Hall**. There is a **Pre-performance Lecture** with **Steve Roach**, Sacramento State director of jazz studies, in the **Studio Theatre** at **7 p.m.**

Says **Don Roth**, Mondavi Center executive director, “The Vanguard Jazz Orchestra is the house band at New York City’s Village Vanguard, where they’ve performed weekly for many, many years. This is jazz big band playing at its best.”

Pricing is \$45/35/25 for regular tickets and \$22.50/17.50/12.50 for students and children. Purchase tickets online at MondaviArts.org, through the Mondavi Center box office at 530-754-2787 or 866-754-2787 (toll-free), or at the door. Accommodations for persons with disabilities are available upon request. This event is presented as part of the Mondavi Center’s **KXJZ Jackson Hall Jazz Series**.

Based in the world-famous New York City jazz club the **Village Vanguard**, the **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** features 16 of the city’s finest players, with a pedigree that goes back to the legendary **Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra**. The story begins in 1966, when cornetist, composer and arranger Thad Jones and drummer Mel Lewis founded a band in New York. Having settled in New York after leaving their respective touring jobs with Count Basie and Stan Kenton, Jones and Lewis along with many of their colleagues needed an outlet for their creative energies and relief from the tedium of the studio work. With a handful of arrangements, they approached legendary club owner Max Gordon and were booked at the Village Vanguard for three Mondays in February. Critical acclaim, awards and international success followed.

In 1979, tired of frequent traveling and the economic uncertainty that even great jazz musicians endure in America, Jones left the band to accept leadership of the Danish Radio Orchestra in Copenhagen. Lewis decided to continue the band, now billed as Mel Lewis and the Jazz Orchestra, and enlisted the talents of his old friend and former band member Bob Brookmeyer, who was just returning to active playing and composing in New York. The band not only survived but, with Brookmeyer’s writing, also continued the innovation and influence that Jones and Lewis has begun. Brookmeyer moved on to other projects and ultimately settled in Europe, with new material coming from within the band.

In 1990, Lewis died after a five-year battle with cancer. For the members, all of whom had been there at least five years—and several for over 10—losing Lewis was a deep family tragedy, for great bands invariably become families. They are also teams, and in this spirit, the members decided to continue the band as a cooperative effort. (When asked who was "fronting" the band, one of the veterans was heard to reply, simply, "the music.")

So those first three weeks in February 1966 have become a permanent gig spanning more than four decades for the ensemble that now is called the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra. Several of the current key members played for Jones, so the original precepts of sound and swinging are proudly held and displayed, while the other original precepts of creativity and experimentation are nurtured and encouraged.

The Village Vanguard is still a great place to be on a Monday night, no matter which side of the bandstand you're on. The orchestra's recording titled "The Way—Music of Slide Hampton" won a GRAMMY in 2004. The group's 2005 recording "Up from the Skies," the music of the ensemble's pianist, composer and arranger Jim McNeely, was nominated for two GRAMMYS, including Best Jazz Ensemble.

Throughout 2006–08, the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra toured the United States and also took a summer 2007 tour of Europe, performing at the North Sea Jazz Festival in Holland, the Imatra Big Band Festival in Finland and the Blue Note Records Festival in Belgium, and at venues in Italy and Germany. The orchestra began a yearly commitment to Jazz Assisi, a concert series in Assisi, Italy, that incorporates the orchestra's education program Precepts of Swing. Read more at vanguardjazzorchestra.com.

- **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra**
- **Fri., March 20, 8 p.m.**
- **Mondavi Center, Jackson Hall**
- **9399 Old Davis Road, Davis, CA 95616 (GPS)**
- **\$45/35/25 regular; \$22.50/17.50/12.50 students, children**
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