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Thad Jones 100th Birthday: Celebrated Through Jazz [REVIEW]

McKenna White, News Editor

The 17-piece Seattle Repertory Jazz Orchestra (SRJO) has been a staple of the Northwest's jazz scene since its founding in 1995. Illsley Ball Nordstrom Recital Hall played host to the colorful, brassy sound of the big band, April 22. The two-part show highlighted work from influential trumpeter Thad Jones in honor of what would have been Jones' 100th birthday.

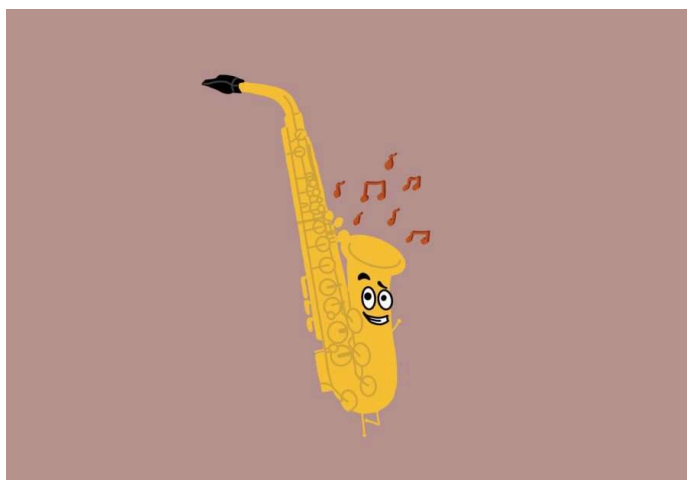
In the period after Duke Ellington's death, Jones is widely considered to be the most influential writer of big-band jazz. With recognizable hits such as "A Child is Born" and "The Groove Merchant," Jones left an indelible mark on the jazz scene. Jones was born into a musical family. However, he never received any formal music training and didn't begin playing the trumpet until age 13. After a stint in the U.S. Army, Jones joined the famous Count Basie Orchestra in 1954. Ten years later, he went on to create the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis big band in New York, winning a Grammy for his work on the 1978 LP *Live in Munich*. Later that year, Jones moved to Copenhagen where he created his own group, Eclipse, and led the Danish Radio Jazz Orchestra.

Saturday's show featured a range of Jones' work from ballads such as "To You" to "Three and One," a unique piece featuring the flugelhorn, baritone saxophone and bass. The band's newest member, Tenor Saxophonist Jackson Cotugno, had a memorable solo on "Mornin' Reverend," an upbeat, swingy piece that prominently featured the saxophones. Cotugno was joined by Lead Alto Saxophonist and Co-Founder of the SRJO Michael Brockman. Brockman acted as the Master of Ceremonies for the night, introducing each song in tandem with Jones' life story and residual impact.

The show also honored trumpeter Nathan Breedlove and guitarist Milo Petersen, both of whom were inducted into the Seattle Jazz Hall of Fame where they join a number of their fellow bandmates such as Bassist Phil Sparks, Brockman, Pianist Randy Haberstadt and Co-Founder Jay Thomas.

While SRJO was officially founded in 1995, many of the group's members had been playing together since 1988 at Seattle's Earshot Jazz Society's annual concert of the Sacred Music of Duke Ellington. 25 years after its founding, SRJO releases dozens of records each year and partners with musicians across the country, bringing fresh sounds to Seattle each year.

The Nordstrom Recital Hall provided a casual, intimate setting in which everyone in the audience had a good view of the band. While their talent and professionalism were clear, the band members spent the evening cracking jokes with each other and the audience. Brown, recently retired director of bands at Roosevelt High School, endearingly delayed songs in order to make a joke or a



self-deprecating comment. While in some settings this may have felt inappropriate, the crowd seemed to love it, with many acting as though they knew the band members personally after having watched them perform so many times.

SRJO's next concert will take place at the Nordstrom Recital Hall June 17 and will feature Flugelhorn Master Dmitri Matheny along with seniors from local award-winning high school programs.