

Chi Class Jazz Project

Hank Levy started Towson University's Jazz Program. Mr. Levy ran the jazz bands at Towson from its inception in 1968 up until the early 90's when he retired for health reasons, among other things. Genn Cashman, a Towson alum who is currently on jazz faculty at Colgate University, was the director of the Jazz Ensembles from then until the spring of 1999 when he left to pursue a performing career in L.A. From fall 1999 until spring 2001, Ron Deihl directed the jazz bands. Mr. Deihl is best known for his stint of over 20 years in the US Navy Commodores Jazz Ensemble. He was the director of the UMBC Jazz Ensemble until 1999, when Towson offered him the job. The current director of the Jazz Ensemble(s) is Jim McFalls. Mr. McFalls is a former member of the US Army Field Band Jazz Ambassadors.

In 1995, the Jazz Ensemble won the Villanova Jazz Festival Best Band Award. They came back to the competition in 2000 to win Villanova Jazz Festival Best Band Award, as well as the Best Rhythm Section Award. The following year, the ensemble walked away from the Villanova Jazz Festival with the Best Band Runner-Up Award.

Several members of the Towson Jazz Bands have gone on to continue with careers in the jazz field, and many have joined professional jazz groups. Heather Hoarst, Lisa Schultze, and Josh Lutz were members of the Mood Swings Big Band, and MSG Greg Reese plays trumpet with the United States Army's Jazz Ambassadors. The most prominent member of the jazz program was its creator, Hank Levy. Under his direction, the jazz studies program was established and gained national recognition by winning jazz festival competitions. He brought the Stan Kenton Summer Jazz Workshops to Towson as well, which led to successful careers for many Towson students. The TU Jazz Bands have debuted many pieces over the years, most of which were written by Hank Levy. One of the most notable was the premiere of "With the Old Man In Mind", which was written for Stan Kenton's birthday. There have also been occasions where local composers have asked the jazz band to premiere their works.

No clear record exists of who may have guest conducted the Jazz Bands, but the most frequent one was Hank Levy. After he retired in the early 90's, Levy was a guest conductor for at least one tune on each jazz band concert. Levy continued to do this up until 1999 when he was unable to continue because of health reasons. Throughout the jazz band's history, several other ensembles have shared the stage with the jazz band. Some of the more recent groups include the Stan Kenton Band and the US Air Force Airmen of Note. The band has also had numerous guest soloists that have included alumni, faculty, and prominent members of the jazz community.

Over the years, the number of jazz bands has changed depending on the number of students involved and the talent available. During the time that Hank Levy directed, there were as many as five full jazz ensembles. In the recent years, there have been two bands, known as the A and B Band. A Band has always met on Thursday nights, it is also commonly called the Thursday night band. Because of lack of members, this year there was only one jazz big band. Hopefully, in years to come the number of people interested in jazz big band will increase as will the number of bands.

There were many brothers of Iota Delta involved in the jazz bands at Towson. These are a few members of the jazz bands at Towson Bob Miller, Tom Jackson, Kennis Rolle, Jim Morrison, Matt Chaison, Joas Shrifferrn, Josh Lutz, Erica Mancia, Chris Rohe, Shannon Loy, Dan Corcoran, Joe Harmon, Megan Gilmore, Tim Brown, Stan Jones, Katie Haynes-Grimm and Gil Roberts.