

## SPOTLIGHT ON

# Marvin Stamm

By Rob Enslin



*Discovered by Stan Kenton in the early '60s, Marvin Stamm has played trumpet with Woody Herman, Thad Jones/Mel Lewis, Duke Pearson, Frank Sinatra, and Benny Goodman. He was New York's "first-call" studio player for two decades before turning almost exclusively to jazz. In June, Stamm made his Swing 'n Jazz debut in Rochester.*

**TCP: It's hard to talk about your career without first mentioning Stan Kenton. What did you learn from him?**

**MS:** Stan was a "larger than life" figure. Playing for him night after night didn't diminish his stature to me. He was very nurturing, even when I had to undergo an embouchure change during my tenure with the band. His patience with me and concern while I went through this ordeal were something few leaders would have endured.

I got a great deal out of my two years with Stan, on several levels. I recorded five albums with the band as the featured trumpet soloist, something that put me in front of a national audience. I also had the experience of being a "road" musician and learning what it was like to perform every night, regardless of the circumstances or how I felt. I learned a great deal from more experienced musicians like trombonist **Bob Fitzpatrick** and saxophonist **Charlie Mariano**, just to name two. And of course, working under Stan was a special part of my growth, personally and musically.

**TCP: You've also worked with a number of other artists — Thad Jones/Mel Lewis, Frank Sinatra, and Benny Goodman come to mind. How did these musicians mentor you?**

**MS:** You've named four people who mentored me just by my working with them and hearing them play or sing night after night. Music is an auditory art form, so you learn mostly by listening and experiencing the music, being part of it all. There are so many people who have contributed so much to my life as a musician, right from the beginning: teachers, musicians from all the places I've lived and worked, colleagues, and peers. Music is a constant learning and mentoring experience, and it never ends. That's what keeps us playing.

**TCP: How has the studio scene changed, particularly in New York?**

**MS:** I left the New York studios around 1990, after 23 years. When I started, we were still recording orchestras and jazz groups of all sizes, "live" and all together. As the technology grew, we started overdubbing, whereby the rhythm would be recorded first, followed by various other sections, recorded separately.

I left the recording scene because I saw the effect synthesizers were having. I also wanted to return to the reason why I became a musician: to play jazz. With the studio, there was less work, written by people of lesser talent that was being pawned off as good music. Mediocrity was – and still is, with rare exception – the byword of the day.

**TCP: How do you prepare differently for your live gigs versus studio work?**

**MS:** I am and always have been a "practicer." I practice almost every day, always seeking to be more of a master of my instrument. Only in this way can a player then put the instrument out of his mind and think only of creating. In

studio work, the preparation on the instrument may be the same, but the mindset is different. In this case, the player has to play whatever is put in front of him, having no choice as to the music he plays. Rather than acting as a creator of music, he is an interpreter of the music. The quality, style, and purpose of the music are determined by the job and the composer.

**TCP: What can we do to support music education and the arts, in general?**

**MS:** Most importantly, support and participate in the arts in your community and include your children in your artistic participation. Support your schools' music programs and demand quality among the faculty. Do not allow your school system to devalue the contributions that the schools' music and arts programs make to the community. The arts touch the heart, the inner person. They are what make us feel the beauty of the world, bringing us together for the right reasons. And when we share these things with our community, interest grows, awareness of the arts expands, and people demand that they remain an important, living entity in the community.

**TCP: Your advice for aspiring musicians?**

**MS:** Follow your dream. But realize that to achieve this goal, you have embarked on a lifelong journey. It takes many years and a great deal of work to become a fine musician, but the rewards are great — not so much in a monetary sense but rather in the sense of fulfillment. If a person should feel at some point that this dream is unattainable, that's all right. He might have to change directions in his life, but he shouldn't give up playing. We should always keep music in our life. Life is so much sweeter when there is music to be played.