



Jim Widner (center) with students

Widner Big Band Camp Turns 30, Remains True to Kenton's Format

OVER THE ARC OF HIS FIVE-DECADE career in jazz, Jim Widner has built an impressive resume as a musician and educator.

He has played bass with the Stan Kenton Orchestra as well as the Woody Herman and Glenn Miller bands. And since 1995, Widner has led his own big band, releasing six albums.

As a jazz educator, Widner led programs at Memphis State University (now the University of Memphis) and directed the Three O'Clock Lab Band at University of North Texas. He received a Jazz Education Achievement Award from DownBeat in 2008. A founding member of the Jazz Education Network, he's now director of jazz studies at the University of Missouri–St. Louis.

Widner is especially proud of his annual big band jazz camps, which mark their 30th anniversary this summer. His camps were inspired by his own experiences as a student, instructor and eventually manager at Stan Kenton's jazz camps during the 1960s and '70s, until they ended abruptly with Kenton's death in 1979.

Widner assumed someone from the Kenton band would restart the camps. But it hadn't happened by the late 1980s, so he decided to take on the task. "I waited a long time for someone else to step up," he said. "And finally, I thought, 'I'm not going to go to that big band in the sky without at least making an attempt to do this.' I contacted the University of Missouri–Columbia, and they agreed to absorb the cost of the first camp in 1988."

Widner recruited several Kenton band alumni to teach and play in the resident big band, and the camp was a success—but not financial-

ly. The university decided not to continue sponsoring it, and Widner found a new home at Drury College (now University) in Springfield, Missouri, in 1989. But he had to fund the camp himself. Widner eventually began to get inquiries about expanding the number of camps, and he was able to start several across the country.

For the last several years, Widner's busy schedule has been the primary factor in his decision to focus on two big band camps each summer. In 2017, the UMSL camp is scheduled June 4–9, and the camp at the University of Nebraska Omaha will take place June 11–16.

"As the years rolled by, doing eight weeks of summer camps took its toll," he said. "Something had to give. But it also allowed us to make these two camps a little bigger and also focus on making them better every year."

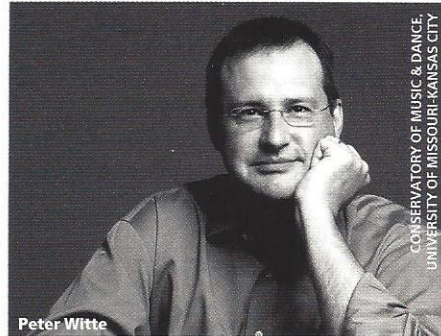
But one thing won't change. Widner remains committed to the essential format of the original Kenton camps.

"That formula worked then, and it works today," he said. "We've tweaked a few things, but the basic concept hasn't changed. Stan used to say that the camps were like 'taking a bath in jazz for a week.' So from initial auditions to classes in ear-training, improvisation, writing arrangements, big band rehearsals and a final performance, that's our focus."

"We end every day with the professional big band playing an afternoon or evening concert. These camps are like living the dream for me."

Prospective students seeking information about this year's camps can check out the website jimwidnerbigband.com/jazzcamps.

—Terry Perkins



Peter Witte

CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC & DANCE,
UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI-KANSAS CITY

New Dean: University of the Pacific has named Peter Witte as its next dean of the Conservatory of Music. Witte, who has served as dean of the Conservatory of Music and Dance at University of Missouri–Kansas City since 2008, begins his appointment July 1. The UMKC conservatory hit its \$48 million fundraising goal—the largest in the university's history for a single project—for a \$96 million downtown Kansas City arts campus for the university while Witte was dean. Witte also launched a new process for reviewing student applications that resulted in a 45 percent increase in enrollment of students of color and international students. pacific.edu

Sinatra Salute: The Temple University Studio Orchestra, under the direction of Andreas Delfs, has recorded *Luck Be A Lady—A Tribute To Frank*, commissioned by the Boyer College of Music and Dance at Temple University in Philadelphia. Temple commissioned renowned composer/arranger Michael Abene for this project. The album features music associated with Frank Sinatra, and is now available via BCM&D Records. It features trumpeter Terrell Stafford and alto saxophonist Dick Oatts—both of whom are on the jazz faculty at Boyer. temple.edu

Honorary Doctorates: Pianist/keyboardist Jon Batiste and Newport Jazz Festival founder George Wein will be awarded honorary doctorate degrees during the May 21 commencement at Salve Regina University in Newport, Rhode Island. Batiste, who is the music director and bandleader for *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert*, will deliver the commencement address. salve.edu

Broadcast Jazz: Nicolas Pillai has written a new book, *Jazz as Visual Language: Film, Television and the Dissonant Image*, published by I.B. Tauris. Through archival research and close textual analysis, the book examines jazz in relation to recording and broadcasting technologies. Pillai is a research fellow in the School of Media at Birmingham City University, U.K. He is the co-editor of *Brilliant Corners: Approaches to Jazz & Comics* (2016) and *New Jazz Conceptions: History, Theory, Practice* (2017). ibtauris.com