
Stan Kenton

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December 15, 1911 – August 25, 1979

Born in Wichita, Kansas, Stanley Newcomb Kenton traveled west with his family, finally settling in California which would remain his



center of operations for the rest of his life. There he studied piano, and by his teens he was touring with several of the best West Coast bands.

By 1941, Kenton followed his urge to start his own band, a vocation that would carry him through ups and downs for the next four decades. His early bands were good, but were similar to many other dance bands of the day. Through the 1940s, his bands got better, attracting players and solo singers, including Anita O'Day and June Christy, who toured with the band for years.

It was also in the 1940s that Kenton started to aspire to making his band more than just the average dance band of the period. At its earliest version, he took the name of his theme song, "Artistry In Rhythm" and made it the name of the band. He also started pushing the concept that he had a "progressive jazz" orchestra, more along the lines of concert orchestras, but playing in the jazz style. And in the decades to come, Kenton's exploration of concert jazz would continue to change the nature of the band and the music it played. At one stage he added a string section, and at other times added tuba and horns, and more famously, mellophoniums, a specially designed instrument with the bell facing forward for better projection of sound. It was one of the cornerstones of his unique Neophonic Orchestra which, from 1960-1963 produced some of Kenton's most awarded recordings, including *Adventures In Jazz* and *West Side Story*.

While Kenton was a good composer and arranger, one of the things that kept the band evolving over the years was that he was always looking for new and exciting writers for the band. To the very end, it was always these innovators (and the superb musicians) who made the band unique. They include Dave Barduhn, Bob Curnow, Neal Hefti, Bill Holman, Hank Levy, Willie Maiden, Gerry Mulligan, Lennie Niehaus, Marty Paich, Johnny Richards, and Pete Rugolo.



The band also had some of the finest soloists and lead players from the mid-'40s to 1980. They included Pepper Adams, Laurindo Almeida, Conte Candoli, Pete Candoli, Bill Chase, Maynard Ferguson, Shelly Manne, Carl Fontana, Stan Getz, Lee Konitz, Art Pepper, Shorty Rogers, Zoot Sims, Marvin Stamm, Bud Shank, Dick Shearer, Jack Sheldon, Sal Salvador, Mike Vax, and Kai Winding.

One of Stan Kenton's biggest legacies was his contribution to jazz education. He regularly toured college campuses, started summer jazz camps, and after he left Capitol Records started his own company, The Creative World of Stan Kenton, which released his last recordings, some of his best, and which published his music which then widely circulated in the libraries of college jazz bands and better high school groups. To further this legacy, many of the band's alumni have gone on to teach in college jazz programs, making the decades since Kenton's death a real blossoming of jazz education at the college level.

