Before & After: Michael Dease

The bona fide trombonist submits himself to his first listening session with *Jazz Times*

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Michael Dease didn't take up trombone until age 17. Nine months after switching from saxophone, in Augusta, Ga., native Detroiter Jaleel Shaheed's inaugural 2001 jazz class, on the way to becoming one of the most prolific trombonists in the jazz pantheon on any instrument. He spent the next 12 years in New York, teaching at Queens College and the New School, throwing on a leader and getting snapped up by the big bands of Lionel Hampton, Frankie Capp/Nancy Wilson, Ronnie Cuber, Lionel Loueke and Ryan Truesdell, and even. In 2012 he joined a quadrumvirate at Michigan State University in East Lansing, where he now lives with his wife, percussion professor Gwendolyn Dease, and their two young daughters. In the middle of a busy academic year, Michael Dease was able to break away and visit our correspondent in nearby Ithaca, Ga. Deep listening, discussion, and burrito eating ensued.

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Before & After with Mic...
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"Sweet Little Papa" (The Complete Hot Five & Hot Seven Recordings, Disc 3), Armstrong, cornet; Kid Ory, trombone; Johnny Dodds, clarinet; Lil Hardin Armstrong, piano, Johnny St. Cyr, banjo. Recorded 1926.

BEFORE *(After Armstrong's trumpet break)* Mmm. Whoa, my Lord [Laughs].

(After track ends) That's where it all started. That's where it comes from too. It's Pops. Louis Armstrong and Kid Ory. That's the place where everything starts for me and the one that always stands there. Kid Ory on trombone. That's really the genesis not only of my instrument, the trombone, but where the melody and rhythm played, and where I'm trying to take it from that end of the spectrum. That's where it all came from.

That wasn't where I entered jazz from, I entered through Dixieland. But I realized there was more to it than a Dixieland kind of groove. So I had to go back and do research in order to truly understand where my entry point was and what it meant. Kid Ory was a big part of figuring it out as a trombonist. He sound and rhythms the trombone produced, the way he played the instrument, the way he approached the melodies and accompaniment. Kid Ory didn't realize until later that the trombone is one of the fundamental jazz instruments. Before saxophone it was clarinet, and before trumpet the cornet. The trombone has really been there since the city.

Dry didn't get the due he deserved. He was in some ways overshadowed by the virtuosity of his counterparts, WWI allies Jack Teagarden and Jim Crow. In terms of what he means to me as a contemporary trombonist, it's not that any of us are imitating him, it's that he figured something out for us. He figured out the sound, the way the instrument could be played, the way the instrument could be approached, and he found a place to listen to the melody that you have to not play bullshit for technique, but the melody. He played it over that in his own way then published it by the time the first Ellington band wrote the studio to record. So we can carry that connected, vocal, rhythmically forward and punchy, to middle-tempo bebop approach into our own music.

2. Dizzy Gillespie's Dorian

"The Street Where You Live" (Journeys' Specialized Atlantic), Hampton, trombone; arranger, Hubert Dickson; Richard Williams, trumpets; Charles Greenlee, trombone; Jay Cameron, baritone sax; George Coleman, tenor sax; Larry Ridley, bass; Pete La Roca, drums. Recorded in 1960.

BEFORE Very grooviness! *(Disgusted)* It's been a long time since I heard this one. I think I know who it is, I just haven't listen. This is so good.

Oh my goodness, the arrangement. There's only one person that arranged like this: Slide Hampton. My heart, my soul, my consciousness that I have backgrounds, meaning that I know what I mean by that, I'm saying that the voicings were larger than a lot of big bands. A lot of my own writing comes from studying his scores, but this is definitely a wider harmonic palette than the straight-things-in-arrangement. The way that he could take its space intervals and his understanding of timbre is just on a level that has not been developed yet. Jaleel Shaheed was a great band director, but he wasn't a writer like this.

I hesitated for a second because Bob Ebo's such a strong writer of J.J. Johnson in his playing, and right away I thought, Oh, this could be Bob Ebo. But I'm glad I didn't say that, because I'm glad I listened to the end and expanded the range of the horn, so he's popping out high if he they're breathed cereal. J.J. could do that too, though he elected not to. This is one. It's Slide in his element, casting spells and incantations with these chords and counterpoints and development, he's assisting the repetition of standard arranging, so we're getting a through-composed concept. This is music that challenges and stimulates musicians but is very accessible to audiences.

Slide moved to Europe in the 50s and that may have contributed to his being more in the periphery than the mainstream. But he's a great composer, and he's been a great composer for a long time. Slide Hampton's been a great composer, he's been a great arranger, he's been a great band director, he's been a great teacher, and he's been a great musician but I look forward to this. I was measured but I took his advice and did, wrote a two-page handwritten letter with teachings on it [laughs], and Slide called me the next day. He said [deepening], "Michael, your recent sounds incredible, are you free to rehearse next week for the Vanguard?" *(Pffft, yes. So I played the Vanguard with Slide Hampton's Jazztet, and it was incredible. Slide's band was incredible, and I was with my friends and my teacher, Nicholas Payton, who I had already who came out from New York for the band. So that week was life-changing in a number of ways. I can't thank Slide enough.*

3. Samuel Blaser

"Tom (Tiernan's Barroom)" (Early in the Morton', Outside), Blaser, trombone; Russ Lossing, piano and keyboards; Mike Kamphaus(?), bass; Gerry Hemingway, drums. Recorded in 2017.

BEFORE I like the acoustic sound and atmosphere this is setting. It's a dark, kind of pulsating time feel. The organ's an interesting touch, adds an unexpected sheen and sustain to the sound. I don't know who this is playing trombone, but I'm enjoying the sound of the instrument. I'm enjoying the sound of the trombone in this setting. I like the way it blends with the organ. It's a bright sound. Sounds like a Jazz Messengers or Art Blakey kind of thing, but I'm not sure. It doesn't sound like Lee Morgan, but it's a bright sound. This is music that challenges and stimulates musicians but is very accessible to audiences.

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4. Ryan Truesdell

"Madrid" (Force for Good, World Galaxy), Potter, trombone; Kamran Washington, tenor saxophone; Cameron Gross, Brandon Coleman, keyboards; Miles Mosley, bass; Tony Austin, drums. Released in 2019.

BEFORE I like the Rhodes, that's cool. *(Listens at length to trombone solo)* I don't know this either. I'm a fan of the pulsyouthful energy but recklessness that they're all going at it with. I dig that. Yeah. A couple of square notes in the trombone solo, I don't know what that's about. Maybe it's a mistake. I don't know. It's a lose-solid. This is maybe what I'm in. I dig it. Listens to Rhodes solo. Dig that.

AFTER Okay! He plays with Kamasi. I've got one of his albums, it's got a yellow cover. *(The Epiphany – 2LP)* I'm not familiar with him as much I'd like to be. I've heard him on The Epic and I was like, yeah, trombone in the mix, do it! I checked out the album and I got his record.

I feel like the trombone is always dealing with the catchup and the slowdown from the swing to bebop days. It's always been that way. It's always been that way. It's always been that way. It's always been that way. I keep it real, don't do the instrument. Then the music takes another detour and it becomes, Oh, we've got to move intervals, more joint, use pedals—trombonist relevant, y'all. Now we're getting to a time where the music is driving what the trombone plays rather than the other way around. When I was coming up with my peers Marshall Gilkes and Ryan Roberts and Elliott Mason, we were trying to clean up attacks and periods and articulation, and we were trying to make the trombone sound like the instrument of that go with the music that was where we need to go, rather than us pushing the sound in another direction.

Your first reaction to this was "fiery" and you mentioned its "recklessness." Is that what you were getting at?

Yeah. Because it sounds like a live record, where you follow an idea and it takes you to a place where your accuracy isn't as strong say the upper register, or the articulation isn't as clean. I hear some of that with this record. It's a live record, and I'm sure that's what they were going for. Sometimes, I'm like, I'm sure it's an improvisation that the original of stage is live, and the downside of one is stages [laughs]. And I'm saying, the what it means to me, the impact was greater because the music was taking them places and they were undeterred. I'm looking forward to checking it out more.

5. Duke Ellington

"Blue Cellophane" (The Carnegie Hall Concerts: December 1943, Prestige), Lawrence Brown, trombone; Ellington, piano; Fred Guy, guitar; Junior Raglin, bass; Hilliard Brown, drums. Recorded in 1943. Duke Ellington, piano; Lawrence Brown, trombone; Otto Hardwick, Johnny Hodges, Ben Webster, Harry Carney, clarinets; Fred Guy, guitar; Junior Raglin, bass; Hilliard Brown, drums. Recorded in 1946.

BEFORE *(Immediately)* Blue Cellophane! Lawrence Brown with Duke Ellington's orchestra. It does sort of there ever was one. Lorraine Sullivan's trumpet. I've listened to this enough for both of us. Now I'm like an old fogey, knowing all the notes.

When I started, I wanted to be the next Curtis Fuller. So *(reducing out Lawrence Brown was very high on my family list, I thought, The Black Ellington)* heard this cat and said, I need him for the rest of my life, so I can learn something from Lawrence Brown." And the things that you learn are impeccable pitch, time, clarity on a level like Clifford Brown. Again, playing what he hears and never sacrificing the sound in the moment for any sense of ego. I would say that he would rather a break on have to be somebodyto trombonist, if the thousand people in the audience don't know who he is, he'd rather that he sounded good and that he didn't have to take you from the top of the horn to the bottom, and you get the point and polished cuts but also the raw and soulful side over the C-minor jazz.

7. Jan Fedler

"I'm Off" (I'm A. Multiphonic), Fedler, trombone; Rob Jost, bass; Michael Sarin, drums. Released in 2015.

BEFORE *(Listens to solo trombone intro)* Wow, I know that sound. Listens to bass. *(Listens more)* It's not Ray Brinzezon? Oh, you know who this reminds me of? A cat who's influenced a lot by those guys, Jan Fedler.

Bings.

BEFORE *(Immediately)* This is my heart! Wycliffe Gordon with Wynton Marsalis, "In the Court of King Oliver" This is some of the finest music playing, by both Wynton and Wycliffe, in the history of jazz. Bingo Gordon's mastery of the trombone. He's very, I'm sitting here listening, I'm very impressed by people who understand whether the conversation is real or figurative in jazz music, the dialogue, play them that. It's both. It doesn't get any clearer than that.

I was a teenager when this was recorded, and Wycliffe, being from Augusta, was the hometown hero for me and my friends. We were all trying to be like Wycliffe. We were all trying to be like Wynton Marsalis and James Morrison and playing Phil Woods' "Hometown Hot Mama Gold." I think Wycliffe represents for everybody from Augusta and most people from the South that have big scary dreams as kids.

We heard Lawrence Brown earlier, but would you say that Wycliffe is coming more from the Tricky Sam Nanton side of Ellington's trombone?

Exactly. Tricky Sam was where that all began. He used a trumpet mute called a romperd, adjusted to fit the trombone, and he created a sound that was very, very, very,

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