
I’ve might have said this before: Michael Dease is the rightful heir to the trombone legacy of Curtis Fuller, and even Fuller himself might agree. Rare is the trombonist who can match the technical proficiency, inventive phrasing and genuine feel that seems to come easily to Dease.

After making a triumphant foray into big band for his Posi-Tone debut Relentless, Dease gets back to small ensemble business for Decisions (August 28, 2015). Heading a five-piece band with Tim Green on alto sax, Glenn Zaleski on piano, Rodney Whitaker on bass and Ulysses Owens behind the drum kit, Dease makes good use of the talent he’s assembled using mostly his own compositions with a couple of standards tossed in for good measure.

Dease serves up prime post-bop in all sorts of flavors. “Grove’s Groove” has a nice shuffling groove courtesy of Owens’ precise drumming, but Zaleski’s spry solo is the high point of a series of fine solos by nearly everyone. The rhythm section forges a crisp, contemporary groove for “Jason’s Gonna Get Ya” that the horns nimbly syncopate around, but Dease composed a complexity to the song that goes well beyond being just a riff. He does the same for “Right Place Wrong Time,” a track where Green’s expressive alto steals the show. Whitaker’s taut bass work anchors a lilting swing for “Decisions,” again a highlight for Zaleski. And Owens gets to show off on the blues based “The Big D.”

Take those stellar individual performances away and you can still be blown be dazzled by Dease’s trombone. He makes it sing on “Gorgeous Gwen” and on ballads like “Everything Must Change” he knows just how much emotion to invest in his trombone to make it believable.

A model of consistency, style and grace, Michael Dease stays at the head of the class among jazz trombonists with his seventh album, Decisions.