

Simply considering the range of music that Marshall Gilkes has played over the course of his career, it would be easy to assume that the trombonist/composer is a musical chameleon, able to alter his sound to fit into whatever situation he finds himself. After all, it seems unlikely that an individual sound would be able to express itself in such diverse contexts as the lush impressionism of the Maria Schneider Orchestra; the unique Slide Monsters Trombone Quartet; or on Monday nights at the Village Vanguard as lead trombonist with the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra.

But listen to the six albums that Gilkes has released under his own name – in particular his latest two, a trio date titled *Waiting to Continue*, and a stunning set of compositions for the WDR Big Band named *Always Forward*– and it immediately becomes clear how the versatile trombonist can integrate myriad influences into a singular and distinctive voice. Gilkes combines the spontaneous invention of jazz with the elegant architecture of classical composition; straightahead swing with adventurous modernism; virtuosic technique with passionate emotion. It's a rare combination that has made Gilkes an in-demand performer, composer, sideman, and clinician since his arrival in New York City in the late 1990s.

They've also garnered him accolades from critics, audiences, and peers alike. Most recently Gilkes received two Grammy Nominations for his album-Köln. Best Instrumental Composition and Best Jazz Large Ensemble Album. In 2003 Gilkes was a finalist in the prestigious Thelonious Monk International Jazz Competition, and won the Rising Star category in DownBeat Magazine's esteemed Critics Poll as well as "Best Trombonist" in Jazz Times 2018 Critics' Poll. Bill Milkowski of JazzTimes has called Gilkes "compelling, harmonically intriguing and ferociously swinging," while bandleader Maria Schneider refers to him as "one of those musicians who continually just drops my jaw and leaves me shaking my head in disbelief."

While his musical career has taken him to stages around the world, including four years in Cologne (Köln), Germany, as a member of the WDR Big Band, Gilkes became familiar with travel long before a trombone ever touched his lips. Gilkes' father was a trombonist and

euphonium player and later conductor in the Air Force, which led the family from Washington D.C. - Gilkes was born on Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland – to New Hampshire, New Jersey, Alabama, Illinois, and Colorado.

It was his father's influence that led Gilkes to pick up the trombone – apparently much earlier than he should have. Members of his father's Air Force band recall their conductor, who by that time had decisively traded his trombone for the baton, suddenly keeping his instrument in his office. It seems his young son insisted on trying it out for himself, and was doing more harm than good.

That early experience laid the groundwork for Gilkes to study trombone in school once the music program started handing out instruments, however. While his early training was in classical music, Gilkes heard jazz from an early age through the Falconaires, then one of the Air Force's premier jazz ensembles, and on his own initiative began collecting albums by the likes of Dizzy Gillespie and Louis Armstrong. Gilkes ultimately entered the jazz program at the Juilliard School, though he continued his classical education in parallel, including studies with Joseph Alessi, the longtime Principal Trombonist of the New York Philharmonic.

From the time he settled in New York in 1998, Gilkes spent the next twelve years working steadily as a sideman while honing his own highly individual voice. In the ensuing years he's played and recorded with a staggering variety of artists and ensembles, including Richard Bona, Billy Cobham, and Edmar Castañeda.

Gilkes released his debut as a leader, *Edenderry*, in 2004 with a quartet featuring pianist Jon Cowherd, bassist Matt Clohesy, and drummer Johnathan Blake. He followed that with the quintet recordings *Lost Words* in 2008 and *Sound Stories* in 2012. His releases, *Köln and Always Forward*, team Gilkes with the German WDR Big Band, with whom he was a member from 2010-2013.

During his four years in Cologne, Gilkes worked with renowned

soloists, composers and arrangers including Michael Abene, Vince Mendoza, John Scofield, Chris Potter, Kenny Wheeler, Randy Brecker, Patti Austin, Mike Stern, Ron Carter, and Maceo Parker. The influence of those experiences can be heard on *Always Forward*, which showcases vivid ensemble writing and arranging which marks the furthest evolution to date of Gilkes' deft combination of his jazz and classical influences.

Those complex and memorable compositions have begun to attract notice from jazz festivals and educational institutions across the country and around the world, leading to invitations for Gilkes as a composer, bandleader and clinician. While he returned to New York in early 2014, life after his interlude in Germany has begun to once again resemble his childhood as an on-the-move military brat. He continues to work regularly with the Maria Schneider Orchestra and his own band while teaching and offering master classes at institutions around the world including the Banff Center, Berklee College of Music, the New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music, and the Brubeck Institute. Gilkes is on faculty at New England Conservatory and is an S.E. Shires Artist.