

# Soul Provider: Delvon Dumas's Hammond B-3 Connection

BY TODD MATTHEWS

Bellingham musician Delvon Dumas arrived at the Hammond B-3 organ like most other musicians: he was lured by its sound. A drummer and trumpeter since middle school, Dumas hadn't really given much thought to the instrument until 2000, when he performed with Seattle-based organist Joe Doria. "I was so fascinated by the organ," Dumas recalls during a recent visit to Seattle. "Just the sound that Joe got out of that thing—I really fell in love with it. It's just the best sound. That's what I wanted to play right there. I quit drums and trumpet cold turkey, and started to play the organ."

Dumas's story is a common one for musicians drawn to the instrument. The Hammond B-3 organ has a sound with roots in several genres music genres: from 1970s soul funk, to the sacred style of gospel, to the bluesy wail that often lends to the instrument's personality. To be sure, the B-3 is big (25 pedals, four sets of drawbars, and a stand-alone cabinet that generates its tone), expensive (quality, used organs cost between \$1,500 and \$3,500), and difficult to transport (Dumas hauls his organ between Seattle and Bellingham in an old van). Of all the instruments from which to choose, the Hammond B-3 organ requires a certain level of commitment that borders on the fanatic. Still, it's the instrument's unique sound—as well as its popularity with audiences—that has kept Dumas behind the pedals and keys.

"In church while growing up," Dumas adds, "the pastor's wife was an organ player. But I never really paid any attention to the organ." Indeed, he spent much of his professional career playing drums full-time (he performed with Patti Summers and Gary Steele and Summers's namesake cabaret bar every Friday and Saturday night for four years) and bass, saxophone, trombone, and flute part-time.

Once the organ drew

his attention, though, Dumas dropped all the other instruments and started listening to as many Larry Young and Jimmy Smith records he could find. He also purchased a Hammond B-3 organ from the trumpeters Thomas and Dave Marriott—an instrument that had belonged to the Marriotts' late grandfather. The only thing left was to learn how to play the organ.

Strangely, that was the easy part. He learned to play the Hammond B-3 the same way he learned to play all those other instruments—by listening to records and practicing intensively. "I'm just a fast learner, I guess," he adds modestly. "It's a gift. I can hear something and play it. I don't read that much. I'm not that good at reading. But if you play it or I hear it, I can pick it up."

Bellingham guitarist Nicholas Hoffman, who has performed with Dumas for several years and hired him to record for a quintet he formed called Fangs, is amazed by Dumas's ability to quickly learn music. "He's a talented guy," says Hoffman. "I heard a demo he made after he had played the organ for maybe six months. As far as I know, he didn't have any keyboard skill at all—and he was just killing it. He came up to Bellingham and played trumpet. Man, he was

just killing it! He's just a real natural. It's really amazing. He can just absorb what he hears. The instrument doesn't matter."

"As far as somebody teaching all these tricks on the organ," says Dumas, "there's nobody to really show me. I had one lesson with Joe Doria. I went over to his house and just played the organ. He said, 'Yeah, you sound good. You sound good.' That was it for an hour. That was the extent of it. But, you know, I just practiced constantly for about a year."

Dumas was born and raised in South Seattle. He joined the Mercer Middle School jazz band in seventh grade, where he played trombone and baritone saxophone, among other instruments. "Whatever we were missing, I could do it," he says. When he entered Rainier Beach High School, he discovered that the school did not have a jazz band program. Still, he settled on the trumpet at drums. Most of his learning came from listening to CDs and records, and sneaking into bars and restaurants to listen and perform. "I'm not going to mention their names, but I would get into some of those places," he recalls. "A lot of people would let me come in and sit in the corner and listen—or sit in and

See Dumas, next page



Organist Delvon Dumas (far right) is pictured with drummer Charlie Workman and guitarist Mike Saskor (PHOTO COURTESY DELVON DUMAS)

## Dumas, from previous page

perform. I would see people who had been around—real experienced—just playing their hearts out. It was a good thing for a youth to see.”

After high school, Dumas started to network with other Seattle musicians. He formed a funk trio called A.D.D., which included drummer D’Vonne Lewis and guitarist Adam Arcano. He also joined the funk-soul-jazz quartet Big Baron, which included drummer Byron Vannoy, bassist Tige DeCoster, and guitarist Arcano. And he joined a 12-piece, funk-soul cover band called Soul Provider.

His most prolific work has been with guitarist Hoffman. The two met when Hoffman showed up to a gig Dumas had with the drummer Clarence “Bash” Robinson. Dumas played

the organ at that gig, and Hoffman took notice. They exchanged phone numbers. A few weeks later, Hoffman invited Dumas to perform at a gig in Bellingham. “I hung out with him at his house,” Dumas recalls. “He hipped me to so much music. I had been playing the organ for a couple years at that time, but I didn’t really know any organists to listen to. I got Larry Young and Jimmy Smith and all the bigger names. But Nick hipped me to people like Don Patterson, and this Japanese lady named Midori Uno. I just listened to Nick’s record collection. It was 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning, and we’re just listening to records and talking. I really owe him a lot.”

For two years, Dumas drove between Seattle and Bellingham to perform with Hoffman and the drummer Jud Sherwood. In December of

See Dumas, Page 23

## Vancouver, from page 8

once clashing and complementary. The 17-piece lineup this time is as always top-rate, with trombonists Lauro Rossi and Sebi Tramontana and horn player Carlo Actis Dato on the stand.

### WAY OUT FRONT, OR OUT THERE

**Lol Coxhill** (sax), a living legend of British music, and bassist **Torsten Müller** front up in duo, July 1. More British legends appear that day in a late-evening show: the inimitable (literally) vocalists **Phil Minton** and **Maggie Nicols**, supported by Müller and Lee.

A huge event will be the appearance by the **Dedication Orchestra** (July 2). The 25-piece band tributes the merger of jazz and South African township music that was championed by the likes of pianist Chris McGregor, saxophonist Dudu Pukwana, bassists Johnny Dyani and Harry Miller, and trumpeter Mongezi Feza—all, now, alas, gone. The Dedication Orchestra is a direct descendant of the mixed-race Blue Notes that drummer Louis Moholo formed in London in 1964. Thanks to the British Council, its 25 members appear in commemoration of the end of Apartheid. The stellar lineup is: **Henry Lowther**, **Claude Deppa**, **Harry Beckett**, **Jim Dvorak** (trumpets), **Fayyaz Virji**, **Dave Amis**, **Paul Rutherford**, **Alan Tomlinson** (trombones), **Ray Warleigh**, **Julian Arguelles**, **Evan Parker**, **Jason Yarde**, **Chris Biscoe**, **Lol Coxhill** (reeds), **Marc Charig** (tenor horn), **Maggie Nicols**, **Phil Minton**, **David Serame** (voices), **Dave Powell** (tuba), **Neil Metcalfe** (flute), **Steve Beresford** (direction/piano), **John Edwards** (bass), **Louis Moholo** (drums), and **Hazel Miller**, the wife of the late South African bassist Harry Miller and a founder of the essential Ogun Records, manager.

Can I have an Amen!

The Americans can bring it, too. At least, the supersaxophonist **Roscoe Mitchell** (July 3) can. The Art Ensemble stalwart is, to say the least, a staggering musician. His skills and imagination invite superlatives, so here is one: There may be no more exciting player in any kind of music, today. In this improvisation-laden quintet, he has some fine, fine support from **Corey Wilkes**, trumpet; **Craig Tabon**, piano; **Jaribu Shahid**, bass; and **Tani Tabbal**, drums.

See Vancouver, page 22

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Pianist Randy Halberstadt performs Friday, July 1 at 8:30pm at Tula's with vocalist Katie King.

### Dumas, From page 11

last year, Dumas permanently moved to Bellingham, where he lives in a second-home owned by Hoffman. "I really like it there," he says. "It's a good little town. It's laid back, like me. It's mellow. People are so nice and friendly. They don't shake your hand, they hug you."

The Bellingham crowd also likes jazz. I made two trips to Bellingham last spring to see Dumas perform, and both events were crowded. "People really enjoy the music there," Dumas adds. "It's a small town, so everybody is looking for music. I have yet to play a show where there's an empty room."

People really get into it. It's almost like they're a part of the band or something. I like that. I respect that."

The two biggest projects for Dumas right now are Fangs (a quintet that includes Hoffman, Sherwood, Dumas, and the saxophonists Hadley Caliman and Gary Hammon) and the Olympic Sound Collective (a funk trio that includes Dumas, guitarist Mike Saskor, and drummer Charlie Workman). Fangs recorded an album last October, which was released by Bellingham's Jazz Project. Dumas was blown away by the opportunity to perform with jazz heavyweights like Caliman and Hammon. "It was awesome playing with them," he says. "That was the first time I ever met Hadley. And I really enjoy Gary's playing. I think he's one of those underrated guys. He has so much history in him, and so many stories to tell. When I was

a drummer for Patti Summers, Gary kept me there. I just liked to sit down and listen to him tell me stories about his younger days, when he was on the road. It was just cool to hear that."

*Delvon Dumas will perform with the Olympic Sound Collective July 23 from midnight until 1am on Sonarchy Radio, heard in Seattle on KEXP-FM 90.3.*

### Festival, from page 12

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