

'Fargo' premiere review: See how the series stacks up against the film

# Even a boxing Michael Lee couldn't 'box' Tristan 'Mack Wilds' into a genre



Shamontiel Vaughn  
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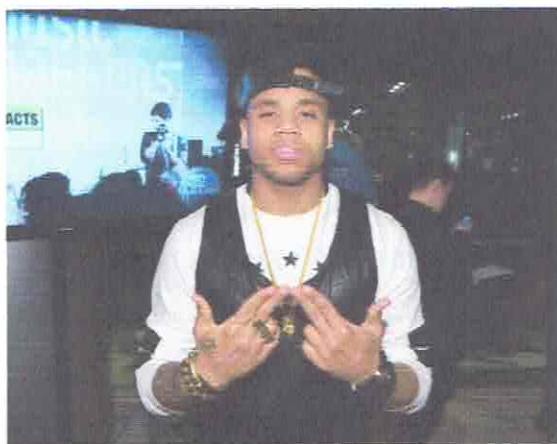


Photo by Noel Vasquez/Getty Images for BET

It's easy to get boxed into an acting category once an actor is consistently recognized for one role. But Tristan Paul Mack Wilds' resume says otherwise. "The Wire" fans recognize him as a student whose a straight shooter (literally). No way in the world was anybody, including Marlo Stanfield, going to get the best of Wilds' character Michael Lee.

Fans of the original "90210" (from 1990 to 2000) may recognize Wilds as what was suggested as the black version of Brandon Walsh. He played the adopted son, Dixon Wilson, in the drama series' remake from 2008 to 2013.

Moviegoers may recognize him as the charming teen Zach Taylor in "The Secret Life of Bees" or the wishful pilot Ray "Junior" Gannon in "Red Tails."

And now he's introducing fans to his first love, music, with the release of his new CD "New York: A Love Story." His single "Own It" has had success on the Billboard charts: eights

weeks in Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs category; and cracked the top 20 on the R&B/Hip-Hop Airplay charts for 20 weeks and 11 weeks in Hot R&B Songs.

In this interview with **The Wire Examiner**, he talks about his singing and acting career, what personality traits he loves in a woman, the relationship with his dad and how he feels about "The Wire" now.

**Shamontiel Vaughn:** I want to talk about "The Wire." I want to talk about your music. I want to talk about your acting. But before I say anything else, I want to tell you that I adore "D.T.M.D." I knew you could sing. But when people say, "Women love the falsetto voice," it's very true. And that song, for me, was your stamp of approval. Yes, he can really sing. This is not something taught. This is natural.

Mack Wilds: Thank you. I appreciate that.

**SV: Which one of your songs is your favorite?**

MW: Each one is kind of near and dear to my heart because we shaved it down to a certain amount of songs. When we actually did get down to the nitty gritty of which songs we were going to choose, me and Salaam [Remi, his producer] used to do this thing. You pick your favorite song. I'd be like, "Okay." It was "Magic" at the time. He'd be like, "So what's your least favorite?" I'd say, "I don't know. 'Remember the Time.'" And we'd go back into the studio and we'd rework "Remember the Time" until it was our favorite. And then we'd play the game again. We did that for a month. After awhile you get to a point where you love something about each and every one of them. The one that probably resonates with me the most, rather than is my favorite, is "The Art of Fallin" just because of the emotion and the content that I wrote about.

**SV: I'm going to get into "The Wire," but because I believe in chivalry, I want to talk about ladies first.**

MW: Of course. Of course.

**SV: On "90210," we had Jessica Stroup. On a video series, we had Sevyn Streeter. On your own video, I don't know the lady's name, but she's got the shaved head. And then we had your ex at the door. And then you were even a love interest on "The**

**Secret Life of Bees." Which one of these ladies is the most [equal to] your type in real life?**

MW: Wow! That's a great question. Each one of those ladies definitely has something that I like about them. Dakota [Fanning, from "The Secret Life of Bees"] is very, very smart. Her intellect is what grabbed me. Savvy [the woman with the shaved head from **Mack Wilds' music videos**] is very street smart. She reminds me of the quintessential round-the-way girl. Sevyn? Her ambition is amazing to me. Her drive and her artistry. She's probably one of the most prolific writers that I know. And you have Jessica Stroup, who also is very intelligent and also very much ambitious and intellectual. So it'd be hard to choose between them. There's something that I liked about every single one of them, which is why I guess you see the chemistry.

**SV: That was a lot of personality characteristics. I'm talking about physical.**

MW: [Laughing] Oh! Physical? Again, I'm more of the guy who chooses more on the characteristic side than the physical side. The physical side appeals to me, of course, you know. But it doesn't matter. You could have a pretty face and no body, or you could have a big butt. It all varies. I'm not very, very picky when it comes to that.

**SV: "Henny" the video says something different. But all right, I'm going to let you slide.**

[Both laugh.]

**SV: On "My Crib," you sing about somebody with brown eyes whose 5'3. Who is that about?**

MW: Honestly I was just calling out a girl that I knew personally. And she knows who she is and so that song was about her.

**SV: Are you still single?**

MW: Yes, I am.

**SV: Okay. Moving on. "The Wire" Season 4 was a big season. And I know people**

**know you as Michael Lee, but you went to a gifted school called Petrides. It sounds like it had to be completely different than the school on "The Wire." What were you studying at Petrides?**

MW: Petrides was one of those schools where you weren't studying anything in particular. It was just an advanced school so in eighth grade I was actually doing eleventh grade work.

**SV: I know you were always into music, and you moved into acting because you saw that your friends were making money from it. But was there anything else you were interested in while you were there or was it always going to be music or acting?**

MW: No. There were a bunch of things that I was interested in. I was always very much interested in art. I was always interested in building things. I could've been an architect of some sort. I think honestly with the way that everything is moving right now certain avenues are opening up to me that I could actually revisit all of the passions that I have even as a child.

**SV: I've heard in a couple of interviews that you were focusing on music and not on acting so much. But when I looked at your IMDB page I see a movie "Black Actress" in 2013. But you did that in the middle of music. What made you take on that project after "90210" was over?**

MW: "Black Actress" was a favor for one of my friends. My friend Andrea [Lewis] who was on "Deglassi [The Next Generation]" and a few other TV shows as well. She was doing a web series, and she asked me to just be a part of it. Of course I obliged. I love acting. Period. I love being creative, and acting is just another form of being a creative. So just like I was on "Black Actress" I was also on Hot 97's television show as well. I'm not going to stop acting. Music is just my main focus.

**SV: I looked in the behind-the-scenes video on your website, and your father's on there. You talk about his barbershop across the street from Stapleton Projects. I don't think I've seen a video with somebody's dad in it since Nas' did the video with his dad ["Bridging the Gap"]. Would you ever do a video with your father, or is he not a performer?**

MW: He's definitely a performer. That's where I get the performance aspect from. He was a

singer gigging around New York City. It would definitely have to be the right song and have the right concept to where it would make sense to have my dad [be] a part of it.

**SV: Are you involved with the barbershop or is that his own business and you just go there to relax?**

MW: It was his own business, and I'd usually just go there to relax.

**SV: Does he still have it? Do you still go there to chill out?**

MW: He doesn't have that barbershop anymore because when I moved to Los Angeles to do "90210" I really trusted my dad with my hair. So I brought him out there to cut my hair. So he had to give up the shop.

**SV: Oh, that's cool.**

MW: My uncle has a barbershop as well. Since I'm back in New York, he's back in my uncle's barbershop.

**SV: There was a special on "90210" where a bunch of the cast members complimented you about your singing. So I knew they knew about your singing. But did the cast of "The Wire" know about your other talents, too?**

MW: Absolutely. I've been writing, singing, rapping since before "The Wire." So even on set, we were rhyming with each other or we were singing against each other. There was always some source of music that was constantly around.

**SV: Did you know about their talents, too? I recently interviewed one of your cast members, Jermaine Crawford. And he sings, too. Do you still keep in touch with the cast?**

MW: Absolutely. I keep more in contact with the kids -- the ones who were with me. Julito [McCullum, who played Namond Brice], Jermaine of course, Maestro [Harrell, who played Randy Wagstaff]. I keep in contact to see how they're doing and where they are in life.

**SV: How did you feel about being one of the sexiest in "40 Years of Fine" in Essence**

**magazine?**

**MW:** It was pretty funny. I don't necessarily consider myself sexy. But I'm glad that somebody does.

**SV:** [Laughs] All right, "The Wire" itself was a big deal, and people were all hysterical about Stringer Bell. What do you feel was the most important part of Season 4 of "The Wire"?

**MW:** The most important part was that time where Michael goes to Marlo and finally asks for help. It's like the kid you're rooting for, like Luke Skywalker going to the dark side. You don't want it to happen, but you know it's inevitable.

**SV: What was your favorite part of doing "The Wire"?**

**MW:** It was the relationships that I've created with the cast and the crew. It really felt like every day [I was] going on set with family. These are people who have bonded together through thick and thin whether you knew you were coming back to a job or not. And they were literally at the top of their game acting wise. It made for an amazing training ground.

**SV: If you were able to do an additional season of one of them, which show would you rather do between "90210" and "The Wire"? And what would you want your character to do on that season?**

**MW:** Maybe "The Wire" because there's more of a demand for that. I would want to see where [Michael Lee] goes. We already understand that he's becoming the next Omar, but I would like to see the trials and tribulations of being that role.

**SV: Last question. What's next?**

**MW:** I'm in such a place right now where I feel so creative. I feel like the world is pretty much my oyster. More music. More videos. More movies. More short films. Maybe some fashion touches. Maybe some directing. I feel like the bounds are endless so just be prepared. You never know what I'm going to do.

***To contact Mack Wilds directly, follow him on Twitter, on Instagram or visit his site.***

**Shamontiel is the Scandal Examiner and the National African American Entertainment Examiner, too.**

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