

Jazz | Bret Saunders

## Turtle Island Quartet will reprise tribute to Coltrane in Lakewood

By Bret Saunders

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The Turtle Island String Quartet with their trophy during the Grammy Awards in 2006. (Hector Mata, AFP/Getty Images file )

The Turtle Island Quartet celebrates 25 years as a group in 2010, but it's only in the past few years that they've received the accolades owed to them since the '80s.

What sets them apart from other classically oriented string bands is the remarkable lightness in their sense of swing and a playfulness that lends itself to jazz and folk music. The San Francisco-based group could be considered the less-serious sibling of the better-known Kronos Quartet. Turtle Island doesn't possess the avant-garde credentials of Kronos, but its members would seem more comfortable in the world of John Coltrane and Dizzy Gillespie interpretations, and that's saying a lot.

Turtle Island will re-create music from its latest Grammy-winning CD, "A Love Supreme: The Legacy of John Coltrane" at the Lakewood Cultural Center on Saturday, and collaborate with the Luna Negra Dance Theater and saxophonist Paquito D'Rivera at CU's Macky Auditorium on Feb. 28. The programs will be completely different from one night to the next, but it's all part of the great continuum, according to violinist and co-founding member David Balakrishnan.

"We decided that we would be a quartet that would reflect the music of America, and jazz is America's classical music," he said. "And Coltrane is the Stravinsky of jazz."

"There's his (saxophone) voice. I fell in love with that spiritual cry, that expressivity and genius at the same time. And 'A Love Supreme' was his statement."

You would expect that a performer who relays that much enthusiasm about another artist to give a respectful performance of that artist's work, and that's precisely what Balakrishnan and Turtle Island do with "A Love Supreme." They gently dig into the essence of that classic recording and come up with a shortened, more accessible version of the original album that could carry fans of classical music over to the jazz side of things.

Balakrishnan is equally thrilled about performing with D'Rivera for the Boulder performance.

"Paquito's a kindred soul," he said. "He has one foot in jazz and the other in classical. And he's found a way to integrate those tradition."

"And he dances."

After taking up the Coltrane mantle, the Turtle Island Quartet (they dropped "String" from their name in the '00s) will head into the studio before their Colorado performances to record a tribute to rock guitar god Jimi Hendrix, including interpretations from his "Electric Ladyland" album.

"That was his 'Love Supreme.' He was a great creative mind of American music, with a stamp of psychedelic."

*The Turtle Island Quartet plays at 7:30 p.m. Saturday at Lakewood Cultural Center, 470 S. Allison Parkway. Tickets are \$20-\$28. Call 303-987-7845. Then, at 7:30 p.m. Feb. 28, the quartet, along with Luna Negra Dance Theater and Paquito D'Rivera, performs at Macky Auditorium, 17th Street and University Avenue, Boulder. Tickets are \$12-\$52. Call 303-492-8008.*

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