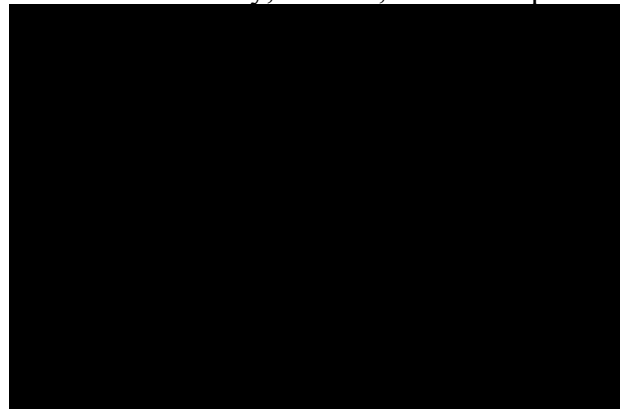


## Turtle Island Quartet to play tribute to jazz icon Miles Davis

By Edward Reichel

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Peter Serling

Turtle Island String Quartet

The Turtle Island Quartet has been in the forefront of classical/jazz/rock crossover music since its beginnings in the 1980s.

In fact, founder and first violinist and composer David Balakrishnan started the group to explore the possibilities that the string quartet medium has outside its traditional repertoire.

And when TIQ comes to BYU on Thursday, it'll bring with it a program of music by jazz icons that is central to the ensemble's repertoire.

This will be the foursome's first visit to Utah in several years, and second violinist Mark Summer, who is the only other original member, said he and his colleagues are looking forward to "School of Miles," the program they'll be playing at BYU.

"It's a tribute to Miles Davis and the musicians who were associated with him, the ones he mentored and brought up," Summer told the Deseret News in a phone interview from San Francisco, where the group has its home. He added that Turtle Island got its start a quarter century ago by playing Davis' music as well as Balakrishnan's.

"David's original vision was having the quartet be improvisational in jazz terms."

During the past 25 years, the program underwent a number of changes. "We've done a lot of different presentations," Summer said. "It started out as a 45 minute program."

He noted that jazz and classical music have some important elements in common. "Jazz is built on classical harmony, and it's group based." Doing a program that features music by some of the great jazz icons together with pieces by Balakrishnan, who finds his inspiration in classical and popular music, is a winning formula, Summer said.

"It's taking the best of what classical music has to offer with jazz, rock and blues."

And TIQ certainly knows how to play jazz. It won a Grammy for their 2007 CD "A Love Supreme: The Legacy of John Coltrane."

"It was an honor getting the award," Summer said. Two years earlier the group was nominated in the best classical crossover category for the album "4+Four," a recording they made with the Ying Quartet.

The foursome has recorded quite a few discs over the years. When the Deseret News spoke with Summer, the group was finishing rehearsals for its next studio session, which the musicians were scheduled to complete by the time they perform in Provo. Titled "Have You Ever Been..." the album consists of music by legendary rock guitarist Jimi Hendrix in Balakrishnan's arrangement for string quartet. It also contains music by composers influenced by Hendrix, including Balakrishnan's new work "Tree of Life."

"Hendrix had a powerful voice with an electric guitar," Summer said. "He changed the sound in interesting ways and made statements about the period. He was a real master."

It was Balakrishnan's idea to do this album. "Hendrix influenced so many players and not just rock guitarists. He was a huge influence on Dave. And his arrangements of Hendrix's music make the string players sound guitar-like."

Joining TIQ on the album are vibraphonist Stefon Harris on "Gypsy Eyes" and mandolinist Mike Marshall, a longtime collaborator with the group, on "All Along the Watchtower." Summer is thrilled with the album. "This is our best record ever," he said.

One of the major works on the CD will be a suite of four pieces from Hendrix's "Electric Ladyland" album that Balakrishnan put together. They'll be playing that on the concert at BYU, as well as a movement from "Tree of Life."

"You might not think there is an obvious connection between Jimi Hendrix and Miles Davis," Summer said. "But there is. They were both innovators."

If you go...

What: Turtle Island Quartet

Where: De Jong Concert Hall, Harris Fine Arts Center, BYU

When: March 4, 7:30 p.m.

How much: \$8-\$13

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