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# Grammy winners fuse classical with jazz in genre-bending performance

by Clayton Smith (<http://thelamron.com/author/clayton-smith/>) on February 12, 2015 in **Arts & Entertainment** (<http://thelamron.com/section/arts-entertainment/>)

The Limelight and Accents Performing Arts Series presented Turtle Island Quartet in Wadsworth Auditorium on Saturday Feb. 7. Students and locals alike came to see the two-time Grammy-winning group perform an impressive sampling of their catalog. Fusing a classical quartet esthetic with a contemporary American twist, the players kept the audience on its toes as their musical approach varied from one song to the next.

Since the group got its start in 1985, it has amassed a repertoire of hundreds of songs spanning genres from folk to bluegrass to rock. TIQ has also explored the music of Latin America and India for inspiration. Perhaps the group has gained such a prominent reputation as a trendsetter in string chamber music due to the diverse backgrounds of its members.

Founding member David Balakrishnan got his bachelor's degree in music composition and violin from University of California, Los Angeles and then moved to San Francisco where he further explored his career as a young violinist. In addition to working for the Winnipeg Symphony for three years, cofounder and cellist Mark Summer performed in multiple ensembles across Canada. Violinist Mateusz Smoczycki is a renowned Polish musician, and viola player Benjamin von Gutzeit hails from Germany.

TIQ's performance in Wadsworth honored the recording of Miles Davis' 1957 compilation album Birth of the Cool, focusing on emulating the sound of the legendary artists that shaped cool jazz as we know it today. The group paid homage to jazz legends Gerry Mulligan, Gil Evans and others who inspired the string players to share their talents in both jazz improvisation and classical technique.

TIQ created an upbeat, jazzy atmosphere on stage. The quartet's "resident composer" Balakrishnan said that the group's varying sound is "the only way to be as a quartet."

TIQ covered Mulligan's "Jeru" early on in the set, setting the stage for a night of relaxed tempos and classical sounds with this calming and buoyant track. The group later transitioned into a slow and lulling melody with Wayne Shorter's "Infant Eyes." Following this piece, TIQ brought new life to Bud Powell's energetic "Bouncing with Bud." The group similarly reinvigorated tracks such as "Venus de Milo"—a piece written by Mulligan for Davis in the late 40s—as well as John Carisi's "Israel."

The skillful reproduction of cool jazz classics didn't take away from TIQ's ability to craft original compositions that drew influence from the post-World War II jazz style. Toward the end of the performance, the stage was cleared for Summer to perform a fast-paced solo piece that earned him a standing ovation. As an encore act, the quartet delivered an unexpected rendition of Bob Dylan's "All Along the Watchtower."

TIQ put on a dynamic show that kept the audience wondering what was next while retaining a polished, jazzy feel throughout. As the self-professed "quintessential 'New World' string quartet of the 21st century," TIQ has succeeded in keeping cool jazz alive.

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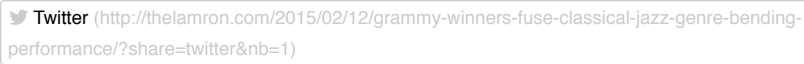
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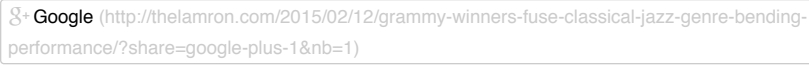
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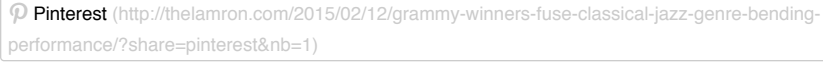
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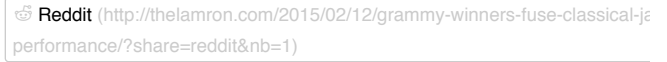
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