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## HISTORY

Its name derived from creation mythology found in Native American Folklore, the *Turtle Island String Quartet*, since its inception in 1985, has been a singular force in the creation of bold, new trends in chamber music for strings. Cellist nonpareil Yo-Yo Ma has proclaimed TISQ to be “a unified voice that truly breaks new ground – authentic and passionate – a reflection of some of the most creative music-making today.” Turtle Island fuses the classical quartet esthetic with contemporary American musical styles, and by devising a performance practice that honors both, the state of the art has inevitably been redefined.

The Quartet’s birth was the result of violinist David Balakrishnan’s brainstorming explorations and compositional vision while writing his master’s thesis at Antioch University West. The journey has taken *Turtle Island* through forays into folk, bluegrass, swing, be-bop, funk, R&B, rock, hip-hop, as well as music of Latin America and India ...a repertoire consisting of hundreds of ingenious arrangements and originals. It has included over a dozen recordings on labels such as Windham Hill, Chandos, Koch and Telarc, soundtracks for major motion pictures, TV and radio credits such as the Today Show, All Things Considered, and Prairie Home Companion, feature articles in People and Newsweek magazines, and collaborations with famed artists such as clarinetist Paquito D’Rivera, The Manhattan Transfer, pianists Billy Taylor and Kenny Barron, the Ying Quartet and the Parsons Dance Company.

Another unique element of TISQ is their revival of venerable improvisational and compositional chamber traditions that have not been explored by string players for nearly 200 years. At the time of Haydn’s apocryphal creation of the string quartet form, musicians were more akin to today’s saxophonists and keyboard masters of the jazz and pop world, i.e., improvisers, composers, and arrangers. Each Turtle Island member is accomplished in these areas of expertise as well as having extensive conservatory training as instrumentalists.

One result of this dedication can be seen in *Turtle Island’s* phenomenal international appeal, particularly in Europe where chamber music remains a vital facet of life. What was once termed ‘alternative’ chamber music now firmly inhabits the mainstream. TISQ members refine their skills through unusual and endemic ‘re-compositions’ of works by the old masters, through the development of repertory by some of today’s cutting edge composers, through performances and recordings with major symphonic ensembles, and through a determined educational commitment. Turtle Island String Quartet promises to be a string quartet for the 21st century.



## DAVID BALAKRISHNAN – Violin, Baritone Violin

David Balakrishnan graduated from UCLA with a B.A. in music composition and violin and earned a masters degree in music composition at Antioch University West. While his thirty some odd years as a world-class jazz violinist qualify him as one of the pioneers of the extant genre, it is as a composer that he has had the greatest impact. The TISQ's founder developed a revolutionary compositional style—based on the principle of stylistic integration applied to bowed string instruments—that has earned him two GRAMMY nominations and numerous composing grants, both from private sources such as conductor Marin Alsop, who commissioned his piece for violin and orchestra, "Little Mouse Jumps," as well as national service organizations such as the National Endowment for the Arts and Meet The Composer foundations. The latter has recently awarded him their prestigious "Music Alive" extended residency with the Nashville Chamber Orchestra, which will result in six orchestral works composed over a three-year period. The NCO also commissioned Balakrishnan's most recent composition, "Darkness Dreaming: Indian Gypsy Jazz Music for Two Guitars, Violin and Orchestra," which premiered in April 2004 with guitarists Sharon Isbin and John Jorgenson. His piece, "Spider Dreams" (1992), has been widely performed and recorded throughout the world by a diverse array of musical organizations, including a live recording by TISQ with the Detroit Symphony conducted by Neeme Järvi on Chandos Records. The Modern Mandolin Quartet recorded Balakrishnan's composition, *InterPlay*, released in February 1999 on D'note records and featured on NPR's "All Things Considered." A 2002 commission awarded by a consortium of presenters headed by the Lied Center of Kansas City resulted in a string octet entitled "Mara's Garden Of False Delights," which is featured on TISQ's upcoming Telarc release, "4 plus Four," featuring the Ying Quartet.



## EVAN PRICE – Violin

Evan Price is steadily becoming one of the most well-respected jazz violinists of his generation. A native of Detroit, MI, his musical background includes some earnest dues-paying in a variety of genres. From square dance bands to string quartets, from jamming with blues bands to busking in Greektown, Price's youthful pursuits all informed his violin-playing and left him with a deep love of chamber music. As a young competitive fiddler he won his share of awards, having been named the U.S. Scottish Fiddling Champion, the Kentucky State Fiddle Champion, Canadian Junior Fiddle Champion, and Canadian Novelty Fiddling Champion. He also performed with some of the masters of fiddle lore—Stephane Grappelli, Johnny Frigo, Claude “Fiddler” Williams, Johnny Gimble, Mark O’Connor, Buddy Spicher, Vassar Clements, and Alasdair Fraser—as well as a diverse array of pop icons from Led Zeppelin’s Jimmy Page and Robert Plant to comedian, Steven Wright. Price’s college career included stints at both The Cleveland Institute of Music and at Berklee College of Music (where he studied with renowned string pedagogue Matt Glaser), and has himself served as a member of the music faculty at Wellesley College. Since joining Turtle Island in May 1997, his talents have been featured on four TISQ recordings. He has contributed arrangements and compositions not only to TISQ’s repertoire but to other artists as well, including Irish fiddler Liz Carroll and the New Century Chamber Orchestra. In addition to his work with Turtle Island, Price is an active performer with the Bay Area gypsy swing band, the Hot Club of San Francisco, with whom he has also recorded several CD’s.



## MARK SUMMER – Cello

Mark Summer is a founding member of TISQ, and is widely regarded, thanks not least to his phenomenal percussion and pizzicato techniques, as one of the outstanding cellists of our time. A graduate of the Cleveland Institute of Music, he was a tenured member of the Winnipeg Symphony for three years, before leaving the orchestra to perform in several Canadian contemporary and Baroque ensembles, as well as his own group, The West-End String Band. Asked to perform at the Winnipeg Folk Festival in 1985, the group went on to record Summer's original music for CBC Radio. That same year, Summer visited the Bay Area where he was invited by David Balakrishnan to help form the quartet. He continued to touch base with his classical roots, performing with the Chamber Symphony of San Francisco, the Oakland Symphony, Oakland Ballet, and the contemporary music ensemble, Earplay. In the twenty years since embarking on an improvisational musical odyssey, Summer has continued to develop a unique and multi-timbered style, which incorporates virtuoso jazz soloing, distinctive bass lines, and extensive percussive techniques adapted from the guitar, bass and drums. He has been the subject of feature articles in *Strings and Bass Player* magazine, and has published two pieces for solo cello, one of which, *Julie-O*, has been performed by cellists all over the world. In addition to composing and performing with TISQ, Summer performs in a trio with clarinet virtuoso Paquito D'Rivera, and has performed and taught at several American Cello Congresses, the New Directions Cello Festival, and Cello Day at the University of Connecticut. He has been recorded for numerous motion picture soundtracks and performed and recorded with singers Linda Ronstadt, Toni Childs, guitarist Jeff Tamelier of Tower of Power, saxophonist Kirk Whalum, and guitarist Will Ackerman. His more notable cello exploits include a performance on Taos Mountain at 11,000 feet on a cello made of ice.



## MADS TOLLING – Viola

Mads Tolling (viola) grew up in Copenhagen, Denmark. Beginning his training as a classical violinist at the age of six, he later graduated from the prestigious Sankt Annae School, where he started playing jazz at age 16. During those years, Tolling received 1st prize in both the prestigious Berlingske Tidendes Classical and Jazz Competitions. While still in high school, he appeared on the well-known Danish TV series "The Spider," performing with several distinguished Danish jazz musicians. After leaving Denmark, he traveled to Boston, where he went on to receive his Bachelor of Music degree at the Berklee College of Music, graduating summa cum laude. During his three years there he studied with jazz violinist Matt Glaser, saxophonist Joe Lovano and pianist JoAnne Brackeen, among others. He has received Sankt Annae's Award for Musical Excellence, as well as grants from Queen Margaret, the Sonning Foundation and the Berklee Elvin Jones Award. Tolling has performed with Jean-Luc Ponty, Joe Lovano, Al DiMeola, Lenny White and Gerry Brown, and is currently a member of renowned bass player Stanley Clarke's band. He has recorded 3 CD's of his original compositions, one of which features JoAnne Brackeen, and has also recorded with vibraphonist Dave Samuels. He is also featured on singer Teena Marie's latest recording, "La Dona."



## Washington Post Review

November 24, 2003

**by Joan Reinthaler**

Who knew? Who knew that the cello was a smashing percussion instrument, that a string quartet could be such a great jazz ensemble, that a clarinet could cry like a baby? (Oh yeah -- we all knew that.) Clearly the eager crowd that poured itself into the DeKelboum Concert Hall of the University of Maryland's Clarice Smith Center on Friday for the concert by the Turtle Island String Quartet and guest clarinetist Paquito D'Rivera knew all about all of this and wasn't surprised by anything that went on.

The artists of the TISQ, violinists Evan Price and David Balakrishnan, violist Mads Tolling and cellist Mark Summer, haven't so much redefined string quartet playing as revealed a huge new set of quartet possibilities. The repertoire they performed was music either written for them or arranged for their special talents from pieces by Dave Brubeck, Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, Antonio Carlos Jobim, D'Rivera and others. In translation every piece gained dimensions of contemporary classical harmonic ideas and contrapuntal formalism, but the genius of the TISQ idiom is that these styles and the colors and idioms of jazz, swing, blues and Latin America were brought together so powerfully.

Technically, the TISQ is in a world of its own. In the hands of its artists, the percussive possibilities of their instruments are fully explored and exploited. Strings and sound box are slapped, tapped and scraped, opening up a full spectrum of jazz-type noises. They also have added to the familiar repertoire of classical bowed sounds an attack that has all the edginess of a trumpet sharply tongued and exaggerated crescendos or decrescendos in the space of a short note. These and exquisite ensemble combined to electrify their readings of the high-energy program.

Clarinetist and composer D'Rivera joined them in seamless collaboration for a number of wonderful pieces highlighted by his own exuberant "Wapango" and Jobim's gorgeous "Passarim."

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