

Turtle Island Quartet, String quartet

Biography

David Balakrishnan, violin
Gabriel Terracciano, violin
Benjamin von Gutzeit, viola
Malcolm Parson, violoncello

Since its founding in 1985 the Turtle Island Quartet have established themselves as a unique creative ensemble, trailblazing bold new developments in chamber music. Awarded the Grammy for best classical crossover album in 2006 and 2008, Turtle Island combine classical aesthetics with modern American musical styles. Renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma described the quartet as “groundbreaking, authentic and passionate – a reflection of the most original trends in the music scene today”.

The Turtle Island Quartet (whose name comes from Native American myth) was the brainchild of violinist David Balakrishnan during his studies in San Francisco in the early 1980s. Following his singular musical vision, he founded a quartet that has improvisation at its heart and in which each member also contributes as a composer. Turtle Island continue a tradition that has been lost over time in classical music; after all, 200 years ago performers were also trained in improvisation and composition. Turtle Island applies this philosophy to the present day: each quartet member has received instruction in jazz in addition to their classical studies.

For over 30 years, the Turtles have made excursions into folk, bluegrass, swing, bebop, funk, rock, and the music of Latin America and India. The quartet’s discography comprises 18 records, released on labels such as Windham Hill, Chandos, Koch, Telarc, and Azica. *Bird’s Eye View* (February 2018, Azica Records), their latest CD, was released to broad critical acclaim:

These four impeccable musicians share Bird’s penchant for expanding parameters and the results of their alchemy are just as golden. (NYC JAZZ RECORD, 24/02/2018, Tiran Grillo)

They have also contributed to soundtracks for Hollywood film productions and regularly collaborate with prominent artists including the clarinetist Paquito D’Rivera, the vibraphonist Stefon Harris, guitarists such as Leo Kottke and the Assad Brothers, the vocal ensemble Manhattan Transfer, pianists Billy Taylor, Kenny Barron, Cyrus Chestnut, and Ramsey Lewis, as well as the Ying Quartet, trumpet player Terence Blanchard, and singers such as Tierney Sutton and Nellie McKay.

With a unique and constantly evolving repertoire of original compositions and contemporary arrangements, a commitment to education outreach with regular masterclasses, and of course their countless performances, the Turtle Island Quartet are considered one of the most pioneering string quartets from the “New World” in the 21st century.

The members

With a history lasting over three decades, the quartet’s lineup, apart from lead violinist David Balakrishnan, has changed several times. While its basic philosophy as an improvising quartet remains intact, new members with unique musical backgrounds bring fresh impetus to the Turtles’ creative development.

Following his violin and composition studies at UCLA, **David Balakrishnan**, founder of the Turtle Island Quartet, moved to the San Francisco Bay Area where he made a name for himself as an improviser, performing with the David Grisman Quartet and the legendary jazz violinist Stéphane Grappelli, among others. With his multifaceted compositional approach, he was nominated twice for a Grammy as an arranger; he was nominated in 2016 as a composer. He has received awards and scholarships from organisations such as the League of American Orchestras and the National Endowment for the Arts. *Spider Dreams*, his composition for string quartet and symphony orchestra, has been widely performed and was recorded by the Turtle Island Quartet and Detroit Symphony Orchestra under Neeme Järvi. He was commissioned by Chamber Music America to mark the quartet’s 30th anniversary in 2015, through a grant from the renowned Classical Commissioning

Program.

Originally from Portland, Maine, **Gabriel Terracciano** is a violinist and composer currently residing in Brooklyn. Classically trained from a young age, Terracciano has spent his career focusing on playing the violin in a variety of non-classical genres, including jazz, bluegrass, rock, and hip hop, among others. He has played both internationally and throughout the U.S., including at the 2018 New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. His most recent awards and honors include Third Prize in the 2018 Zbigniew Seifert Jazz Violin Competition and Finalist in the 2018 Freshgrass Fiddle Competition. He holds undergraduate degrees from Tufts University and the New England Conservatory of Music, as well as a master's degree from New York University in Jazz Performance. He has studied with Tanya Kalmanovitch, Don Doane, Cecil McBee, John Scofield, Ari Hoenig, and Rob Thomas, among others.

Cellist **Malcolm Parson**, is at home in both the realms of classical music and jazz, and connects the two worlds with virtuosity and musical imagination. Originally from New Orleans, he graduated from the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra's Talent Development Program and the Berklee College of Music, performing with an orchestra as a soloist for the first time at the age of 14. A long-standing member of the old-time band Carolina Chocolate Drops, which won a Grammy Award in 2011, Malcolm Parson has also shared the stage with musicians such as James Lauderdale, Ron Carter, Terri Lynn Carrington, and Dave Liebman. He has composed numerous solo and ensemble works as well as film music. His work Solitude, originally conceived as a solo piece with the choreographer Julia Gleich, was performed by the Forsyth Youth Orchestra in a version for cello and orchestra in 2015.

Benjamin von Gutzeit is one of the few respected jazz violists working today. Born in Bochum, Germany, he was brought up in a musical family: his father is a renowned music teacher, his mother a pianist, and two of his siblings are successful classical musicians. He began playing the viola at the age of four, on a very small violin with viola strings. As a twelve-year-old he started taking lessons with the violist of the Orpheus String Quartet, Emile Cantor. Competition wins at Jugend Musiziert in 1992 and 1994 resulted in his first tour of Japan. After a short stint as a bass guitarist, he studied under the jazz violinist Andreas Schreiber at Bruckner University in Linz from 2001. He continued his jazz studies in Amsterdam in 2004 and performed with numerous musicians in the Dutch jazz scene. He moved to New York in 2010 to study in the jazz department of the Manhattan School of Music, where he was the first violist to graduate with a master's degree. Since then, Benjamin von Gutzeit has worked with world-famous musicians such as the jazz violinist Mark Feldman, electronic virtuoso Matthew Herbert, cellist Ernst Reijseger, and the saxophonist Dave Liebman.

2020/21 season

This biography is to be reproduced without any changes, omissions or additions, unless expressly authorised by the artist management.

<https://en.karstenwitt.com/artist/turtle-island-quartet>

Document generated on 10/11/2022 04:11

en.karstenwitt.com