

# TURTLE ISLAND QUARTET

**Mateusz Smoczyński**, Violin  
**David Balakrishnan**, Violin, Baritone Violin  
**Benjamin von Gutzeit**, Viola  
**Mark Summer**, Cello

## *Birth of the Cool*

Reaching for lyricism and gentler textures as a reaction to the fiery sounds of bebop, the renowned musicians who performed on the seminal recording, *Birth of the Cool*, consider it a tipping point towards the style that became known as “Cool Jazz.” The living embodiment of cool, Miles Davis, and his colleagues, Gil Evans, Gerry Mulligan, Lee Konitz, etc., set the table for a slew of legendary groups that shared their vision. From the Modern Jazz Quartet and Gunther Schuller of third stream music, to the west coast sounds of the Dave Brubeck Quartet with Paul Desmond, to the iconoclastic melodic lines of pianist Lennie Tristano, their particular brand of innovative genius echoed into the myriad jazz fusion blends of the seventies and eighties. Ultimately, this created the perfect conditions for an audacious group of four string players equally grounded in jazz improvisation and classical technique, to split the Eurocentric string quartet atom.

In addition to employing their signature groove-based rhythmic techniques to transform classic selections from the recording of *Birth of the Cool* such as *Israel*, *Venus De Milo*, and *Jeru* into jazz string quartet masterpieces, the two time GRAMMY® winning Turtle Island Quartet will take a wide swath through the many other avenues traversed by these intrepid explorers of cool. Perennial favorites such as Dave Brubeck’s *Blue Rondo A La Turk* and Gerry Mulligan’s *Bernie’s Tune* conjoin with Miles Davis’s dreamy *Miles Ahead*, and the Modern Jazz Quartet’s darker *Django*. The program will also feature original compositions that share the cross genre musical stamp endemic to this hallowed mode of jazz music making.

There will be a short intermission.

~Turtle Island Quartet Recordings: Telarc, Koch International Classics, Windham Hill, Chandos, CC&C Records, GRP, BMG

*Turtle Island Quartet is represented by:*



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## **Turtle Island Quartet Biography**

Its name derived from creation mythology found in Native American Folklore, the ***Turtle Island Quartet***, since its inception in 1985, has been a singular force in the creation of bold, new trends in chamber music for strings. Winner of the 2006 and 2008 GRAMMY® Awards for Best Classical Crossover category, ***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. Cellist nonpareil Yo-Yo Ma has proclaimed ***TIQ*** to be “a unified voice that truly breaks new ground – authentic and passionate – a reflection of some of the most creative music-making today.”

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, new age, 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, Prairie Home Companion, and Morning Edition, feature articles in People and Newsweek magazines, and collaborations with famed artists such as clarinetist Paquito D’Rivera, vibraphonist Stefon Harris, guitar legends Leo Kottke and the Assad brothers, The Manhattan Transfer, pianists Billy Taylor, Kenny Barron, Cyrus Chestnut and Ramsey Lewis, singers Tierney Sutton and Nellie McKay, the Ying Quartet and the Parsons and Luna Negra Dance Companies.

Another unique element of ***Turtle Island*** 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 ***Turtle Island*** members continue to refine their skills 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, the ***Turtle Island Quartet*** stakes its claim as the quintessential ‘New World’ string quartet of the 21st century.

For more information on the Turtle Island Quartet, please visit [www.turtleislandquartet.com](http://www.turtleislandquartet.com)  
You can also ‘friend’ the group on Facebook or follow us on Twitter @TurtleQuartet

**David Balakrishnan** (violin, baritone violin), the group’s ‘resident composer,’ graduated from UCLA in 1976 with a B.A. in music composition and violin. Moving to the San Francisco Bay Area, he quickly established his reputation as a talented young improvising violinist, making guest appearances with the David Grisman Quartet and jazz violin legend Stephane Grappelli, and earning a Masters Degree in music composition at Antioch University West. His signature compositional style—based on the principle of multi-stylistic integration applied to bowed string instruments—established the TIQ template that, in addition to the group awards, has earned him GRAMMY® nominations in the arranging/composing categories and led to numerous grants, both from private sources such as conductor Marin Alsop, who commissioned his piece for violin and orchestra, “Little Mouse Jumps,” as well as organizations such as the National Endowment for the Arts, Chamber Music America, League of American Orchestras and Meet The Composer. In 2005 he received a MTC/ASOL “Music Alive” residency with the Nashville Chamber Orchestra (largest orchestral composing grant of the year) for which he composed six works. The NCO also commissioned Balakrishnan’s composition “Darkness Dreaming,” 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 Turtle Island with the Detroit Symphony conducted by Neeme Järvi on Chandos Records. A 2002 commission awarded by a consortium of presenters headed by the Lied Center of Kansas resulted in a string octet entitled "Mara's Garden Of False Delights," which is featured on Turtle Island's Grammy winning Telarc release, "4+Four." Again commissioned by the Lied Center in 2008, Balakrishnan composed a full-length work involving theatre, dance, poetry, video, and TIQ with the KU wind ensemble that is an artistic response to the socio/political issues concerning the various theories of evolution, both scientific and cultural, entitled "The Tree Of Life." This year he received Chamber Music America's prestigious Classical Commissioning Program grant, supporting a full-length work commemorating the quartet's upcoming 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary season.

**Mark Summer** (cello) is a founding member of Turtle Island 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, and a recipient of their 2008 Distinguished Alumnae award, Summer was a tenured member of the Winnipeg Symphony for three years before leaving to perform in multiple ensembles in Canada, including a performance at the Winnipeg Folk Festival, and a recording that included his own compositions for CBC radio. In the nearly three decades 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 magazines, and has written and arranged many pieces for solo cello, one of which, "Julie-O," was featured on NBC's "Parenthood" and has been performed by cellists around the world. In addition to composing and performing with Turtle Island, Summer performed for several years in a trio with clarinet virtuoso Paquito D'Rivera, participating in the trio's 2005 GRAMMY®-nominated recording The Jazz Chamber Trio. In 2011, he made his American debut as an orchestral soloist, premiering David Balakrishnan's cello concerto "Force of Nature", written especially for Mark. In 2013, he had his European solo premier, performing the concerto with both the Neuss Chamber Orchestra and the Georgian Chamber Orchestra Ingolstadt. For the last three summers, he has taught and performed recitals at Cello: An American Experience, a program for young cellists at St. Olaf College. In addition to his duties with the quartet, Mark currently performs in a trio with 6 time GRAMMY®-nominated jazz singer Tierney Sutton.

**Mateusz Smoczynski** (violin) is a graduate of the Frederic Chopin Academy of Music in Warsaw, Poland. A student of Andrzej Gebski. He has collaborated with the most renowned Polish musicians, Urszula Dudziak, Tomasz Stanko, Krzesimir Debski, Zbigniew Namysłowski and Jaroslaw Smietana to name a few. Together with Joachim Kuhn, Janusz Stefanski and Bronislaw Suchanek, he took part in the premiere of legendary jazz violinist Zbigniew Seifert's Jazz Concerto for Violin, Symphony Orchestra and Rhythm section. Mateusz leads his own quintet with which he recorded his first CD "Inspirations", dedicated to his two biggest music influences, John Coltrane and Zbigniew Seifert. After the success of his first album in 2007, Mateusz received the Minister of Culture and National Heritage Scholarship, and in June 2008 was awarded a "Jazz Oscar" in the category "Music Lovers' Hope of 2007". In 2008, his second recording "Expressions" was released to popular acclaim. In 2009, Mateusz formed a band with his brother Jan on Hammond organ and the Russian drum star Alexander Zinger called "New Trio". In 2010 they released their first CD "Simultaneous Abstractions" which was nominated for "Jazz Album Debut of the Year" for a Fryderyki award ("the Polish Grammy"). That same year Mateusz co-founded the Atom String Quartet, the very first Polish jazz string quartet. They have recorded two CDs: "Fade In" which won Fryderyki award for "Jazz Album Debut of the Year" and "Places" which won Fryderyki award for "Jazz Album of the Year". The Atom String Quartet was also on the first place in Jazz Top (survey of readers Jazz Forum magazine) in category Acoustic Jazz Group of the Year 2013 and received first prize for the "Bielska Zadymka Jazzowa" Competition, the most important jazz competition in Poland. Mateusz had the

opportunity to play with pianist Richie Beirach, trumpeter Ack van Rooyen, bassist Glen Moore, and drummer Janusz Stefanski, at the "Zbigniew Seifert in Memoriam" Festival. In 2014, he also performed with Bobby McFerrin at the "Solidarity of Arts Festival".

**Benjamin von Gutzeit** (viola), one of only a handful of true jazz violists worldwide, was born in Bochum, Germany, into a musical family. His father is a well-known music pedagogue; his mother a pianist and two of his siblings are classical string players. He began his viola studies at the age of four, starting on a very small violin that was fitted with viola strings. He received instructions from his father until age twelve when he became the student of violist Emile Cantor of the Orpheus String Quartet. Benni consecutively won the 1992 and 1994 German Youth Competition Jugend Musiziert, which led to a solo concert tour in Japan. At age fifteen, he developed a fascination for popular music and took up playing the electric bass in addition to viola. From 2001 to 2004 he studied at the Bruckner Conservatory in Linz, Austria, under the tutelage of jazz violinist Andreas Schreiber. In 2004 Benni moved to Holland to further his jazz studies at the Conservatory of Amsterdam with saxophonists Ferdinand Povel and Jasper Blom and guitarist Jesse van Ruller. He became an active participant of the Dutch jazz scene and performed with numerous groups including: Elastic Jargon by Maurice Horsthuis and Starvinsky Orkestar by Martin Fondse. He was sought after at prominent concert venues and festivals such as the Bimhuis and the famed North Sea Jazz Festival. In 2010 he moved to New York City (supported by scholarships of the Dutch Fonds Podiumkunsten, the Deutsche Stiftung Musikleben and the Kogel&Schmidt Foundation) and became the first violist to earn a Master's Degree from the Jazz department of the Manhattan School of Music. Benni has performed and recorded with many great musicians including jazz violinist Mark Feldman, electronic music virtuoso Matthew Herbert, cellist Ernst Reijseger, and Saxophonist Dave Liebman.