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## Turtle Island Quartet tackles Coltrane's legacy

**The string quartet is an unlikely but felicitous vehicle for the music of the man known for 'A Love Supreme.'**

By Don Heckman  
Special to The Times

A string quartet—even one with the jazz credentials of the Turtle Island Quartet—might seem to be the last source for a program of John Coltrane's music.

But the group's appearance Thursday at the Jazz Bakery, supporting the recent release of its Telarc CD "A Love Supreme: The Legacy of John Coltrane," was a sterling example of first-rate jazz music-making, whatever the instrumentation.

Despite the Coltrane focus, the evening opened with a jaunty romp through Dave Brubeck's "Blue Rondo á la Turk." Anyone doubting that a string quartet, sans rhythm section, can swing as hard as any traditionally instrumental jazz group quickly learned it can. Especially when the jazz attributes spring from the individual talents of players as skilled as violinists Evan Price and David Balakrishnan, violist Mads Tolling and cellist Mark Summer.

The sounds of Coltrane initially surfaced in tunes associated with his extraordinary soloing ("A Night in Tunisia," "Round Midnight") as well as his own composition "Moments Notice," delivered in a particularly propulsive arrangement by Summer.

The soloing was superb, with the members offering contrasting qualities: clarity and precision from Price's focused lines; dark, be-bop driven passions from Balakrishnan; horn-like phrasing from Tolling; and startlingly virtuosic, scour-the-instrument passages from Summer.

The *pièce de résistance* was Coltrane's classic, four-movement work, "A Love Supreme." Although the piece has been reinterpreted many ways since it was recorded in the '60s (including "A Guitar Supreme" by Larry Coryell, Mike Stern and others, and a CD/DVD version by Branford Marsalis), the Turtle Islanders' take is unique. Balakrishnan's thoughtful arrangement recalled passages from Coltrane's original solos while creating lush textures and whirlwind rhythms underscoring both the musical and the spiritual complexities of the original composition.

The set concluded with bassist Stanley Clarke's tribute to Coltrane, "Song to John," played in a complex but musically gripping arrangement by Tolling. The result was a blending of sheer technical virtuosity with the lift and spontaneity of exploratory jazz—the appropriate element for a performance inspired by one of the music's most virtuosic and adventurous artists.