

NEWS RELEASE



UMass Amherst Fine Arts Center

www.fineartscenter.com

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WHAT: UMASS FINE ARTS CENTER, CENTER SERIES

Turtle Island Quartet with Stefon Harris performing the Divine Duke

WHEN: Tuesday, February 5 at 7:30pm, 2008

**WHERE: Bowker Auditorium
University of Massachusetts Amherst
Call 1-800-999-UMAS or 545-2511 for tickets or
go online to www.fineartscenter.com/tickets**

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(Center Series Begins Spring Season with Sacred Music of Duke Ellington)

Mention the name of Duke Ellington and the vision that springs forth is of his splendid form and wonderful smile fronting one of the world's most famous big bands, a jazz pianist extraordinaire and composer of scores of tunes that were the biggest hits of his time. It is not commonly known that there was a serious spiritual side of the Duke as well. His visionary music combined jazz with classical and gospel forms, foreshadowing the classical crossover genre of today's musical world. It provides a perfect jumping off place for an exciting new collaboration with the Grammy winning Turtle Island Quartet and virtuoso of the mallets, Stefon Harris. They bring this exciting, mutual effort to the UMass Bowker Auditorium on Tuesday, February 5th at 7:30pm.

Taking its name from Native American creation mythology, the Grammy award-winning **Turtle Island Quartet** has been a singular force in the creation of bold, new trends in chamber music since its inception in 1985. Founded by violinist David Balakrishnan, the Quartet fuses classical esthetic with contemporary American musical styles. Its ingenious arrangements and original compositions incorporate elements of folk, bluegrass, swing, be-bop, funk, R&B, rock and hip-hop, as well as the musical motifs of Latin America and India. Turtle Island has collaborated 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. It

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has also recorded soundtracks for major motion pictures, TV and radio programs including the *Today Show*, *All Things Considered* and *Prairie Home Companion*.

Vibraphonist-composer **Stefon Harris**, heralded as "one of the most important young artists in jazz" (*The Los Angeles Times*), is unquestionably developing what will be a long and extraordinary career. Harris' passionate artistry, energetic stage presence and astonishing virtuosity have propelled him to the forefront of the current jazz scene. Widely recognized and lauded by peers and jazz critics alike, the 30 year-old Harris is committed to both exploring the rich potential of jazz composition and blazing new trails on the vibraphone.

Of special note in any TIQ performance is the element of improvisation. Its most common utilization features a soloist improvising over a background, also often partially or completely improvised, that follows a fixed sequence of chords and rhythm. Almost every piece in the program will have such sections. In addition, an attempt is made to give each member of the group a chance to "stretch out" in an extended feature solo spot at least once in any full-length performance. However, it is also the case that some pieces are completely written out or contain short sections where the improvisation serves the needs of the composition as opposed to the expression of an individual viewpoint. Still other pieces have large sections of "free" improvisation which challenge the group (and the audience, for that matter!) to grapple with completely uncharted musical territory.

The Turtle Island Quartet and Stefon Harris will perform on Tuesday, February 5th at 7:30pm in Bowker Auditorium. Tickets are \$25, \$15; youth 17 and under are \$12 and Five College Students are \$10 and \$7. For tickets and information, call the Fine Arts Center Box office at 413-545-2511 or 1-800-999-UMAS, or go online to www.fineartscenter.com/centerseries. This performance is sponsored by Florence Savings Bank and WFCR 88.5FM.

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