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## Classical string quartet swings to the rhythm of jazz

BY ROGER LEVESQUE, FREELANCE JANUARY 23, 2009

BLUE BY FOUR STRATHCONA STRING QUARTET

CD Release Party

Where: Yardbird Suite, 10203 86th Ave.

When: 2 p.m. Sunday

Tickets: \$10 at the door

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There's no law that says classical players can't play jazz, but it certainly packs a special challenge. Violinist Jennifer Bustin, founder of the Strathcona String Quartet, knows all about that. As the group prepares to release its jazzy second recording Blue By Four, she will tell you that "it's all in the rhythm."

"Other music -- Bartok or whatever -- has its own challenges but with jazz, rhythm is the whole issue."

Over 15 varied tracks, the hour-plus disc offers a mix of standards from 'Round Midnight and In the Mood to original tunes, all arranged and/or composed by the group's senior violinist, George Andrix.

While viola player Moni Mathew and cellist Josephine van Lier complete the quartet, two guest jazz players, trumpeter Joel Grey and bassist John Taylor, who plays in the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, join as soloists and add to the sense of swing. Quartet members play a few solo features too.

For his role, Andrix agrees that rhythm and arranging are crucial in translating a jazz feeling to string quartet music.

Like many classical players, he was initially wary of trying to improvise.

"Most of us spend so much time trying to duplicate as precisely as possible what's on that piece of paper," he says.

"It wasn't until the last 10 or 15 years that I got the courage to stand up and try and take a solo. But I've always been interested in jazz and often drew on jazz influences for my regular classical compositions."

Maybe it's not so unusual that the quartet is taking this little adventure. They enjoy a wide range of influences, experiences and side interests. The group's past repertoire has mixed up the classics and contemporary composers, and included a collaboration with Mile Zero Dance Company. Andrix also explored jazz-oriented works on the group's debut disc (2004, Arktos).

Edmonton native Bustin founded the quartet in 1987 when she was a music undergrad at the University of Alberta. She wanted to satisfy the needs of student composers and take advantage of performance opportunities. Along the way, she fell in love with making chamber music.

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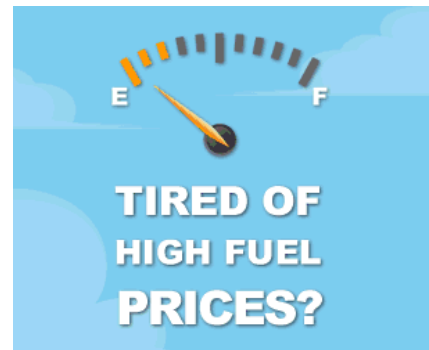
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Chicago-born Andrix joined the quartet in 1995 following a position in the ESO and even a hiatus from music that saw him become a sheep farmer. He became an avid jazz fan in college, when he also played saxophone.

Dutch-born cellist Josephine van Lier joined the quartet shortly after her move here in 1995. One of the busiest musicians in Edmonton, she can be seen playing in the ESO or many other chamber settings.

Edmonton's Moni Mathew, the only member with jazz training from Grant MacEwan College, joined in 2004, taking over the viola.

Over the years they've done their share of busking, especially at the Old Strathcona Farmers Market.

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