

Boise Weekly

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The Minneapolis Guitar Quartet, December 2, Boise State Special Events Center

Live Show Review

BY [VINCENT MIRE SSE](#)

How did Bach hear entire orchestras in his head and then manage to organize and write down all the parts on paper in some meaningful context? A mind of brilliance? Technical mastery? Surely, it was a bit of both. An evening with the Minneapolis Guitar Quartet (MGQ) was a concert of collaborative genius and technical mastery alike. With a repertoire ranging from Renaissance and Baroque to Spanish, South American, and Romantic to commissioned contemporary pieces, MGQ truly satisfied the Boise audience's desire to hear some exquisite music Saturday evening. Strolling out onto the stage clad in black suits, MGQ appeared seasoned veterans despite the baby-face of their youngest member.

With a nod of the head and a flick from fingers and nails, the Quartet began their concert with Astor Piazzolla's "Windy," a beautifully harmonious composition from Argentina full of Tango melody with rehearsed arpeggios sequentially spanning across the fingertips of all four members. "Windy" concluded with the eerie calm after a storm full of dissonant chords sure to please a twisted ear, and then Nicholas Raths, the senior and founding member of MGQ, wittily squashed my preconceived notion of Jeff Lambert's appearance by saying, "Jeff is the youngest member of the group. That's why we give him all the hard parts."

After intermission, MGQ played "Minneapolis Winter, Chicago Summer," an original score by Lambert, which though classically grounded, had a jazz form with a poppy chorus section, giving younger patrons something to grab onto.

Perhaps the most remarkable piece of the night, "Ghetto Strings," was composed by New York's Daniel Bernard Roumain. MGQ performed two of the four movements, "Harlem" and "Haiti." The long and groovy bass line and jazz riffs in "Harlem" made me feel as if I was there in the early 1960s truly feeling and understanding the jazz culture that has since defined some of our national music identity. "Haiti" touched me viscerally and forced the realization of poverty, inhumanity and injustice that is presently ripping the half-island nation into shreds.

Upon a much-deserved standing ovation, the Quartet sat down to play one final piece, White Out, the Midwestern based group's version of a very snowy Wipe Out. With Joseph Hagedorn's tremoloed falsetto, "white out," Raths and Lambert using their guitars as a drum kit, and Jeffrey Thygeson pulling the group toward Beethoven's 5th, MGQ weaved in and out of Dick Dale surf tunes and classical piano pieces finishing it all off with a sure win--the Beatles' "I Wanna Hold Your Hand," thus giving their audience a performance filled with technical mastery, witty commentary, intellectual writing and arrangements, and the light-heartedness that reminded us all that MGQ is indeed human.