

CONCERT REVIEW

Billy Childs and Ying Quartet provide dramatic meeting of jazz and classical

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KALAMAZOO — Part of the stage at Western Michigan University's Dalton Center on Friday night was occupied by five seasoned jazz musicians, including a harpist. Another part was taken up by the Ying Quartet, a world-class classical string quartet.

Also on stage and central to the mix sat composer Billy Childs at a piano. He was to perform a musical alchemy of sorts by taking the rich styles of the two distinct musical units and creating something new



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and wonderful for the Fontana Chamber Arts concert.

The result seemed more natural than one might think. For one night at least, jazz and chamber music became one — a sprawling adventure with bits of humor, a touch of darkness and lots of drama.

The combined performance with Childs and the Ying Quartet was a highly anticipated event among Fontana

followers. Childs was commissioned to create a composition for the date, "The Path Among The Trees."

Mixing classical and jazz is nothing new. That goes back to Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" in 1924. But Childs is one of the more successful musicians doing it today.

In 2006, he won two Grammy awards, for best instrumental composition and for best arrangement accompanying a vocalist. That year, he was also nominated for best instrumental album and for best instrumental arrange-



Billy Childs



The Ying Quartet

ment.

Childs' arrangement of musical performances at Dalton allowed the ears of listeners to gradually embrace his fusion of jazz and classical. The first half featured Childs' ensemble

which played impressionistic tonal poems filled with great crests, deep valleys, balmy breezes and shots of thunder.

Sharp bursts of percussion from fine drummer Brian Blade was often the thunder. He juggled percussive colors with ease and precision all night long.

The second half began with the members of the Ying Quartet playing the foreboding "Oscura," which was written for them by Childs. That blended into a performance of Childs' Grammy-winning "Into the Light" by all the musicians on stage.

Harpist Carol Robbins broadened minds by showing what intriguing texture a harpist could add to a hip musical setting. Guitarist Larry Koonse surprised with a fluid guitar solo that was both cerebral and passionate in Childs' composition "American Landscape," which closed the first half of the show.

The members of the Ying

Quartet, violinists Timothy and Janet Ying, violist Phillip Ying and cellist David Ying all added richness to the mix and provided greater intensity to the program. But the show was more about the music than any talented player or group.

Solos, typically breaks or spotlights for musicians, developed organically in Childs' music. Then the solos served a dual purpose by helping to advance other portions of the compositions being played.

Most of the compositions in the two-and-a-half-hour show were lengthy which, for some, was to their detriment. But patron restlessness was often short-lived, since listeners were treated to a variety of fire-filled moments when the players jelled and let loose.

Childs led his jazz ensemble in an exciting three-figure motif in "Scarborough Faire," and as the musical idea developed, band members hit harder and harder, leaving patrons reeling in their wake.

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