

The Word From:

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Music soothes jangled nerves at RDU

For the holidays, Muzak gives way to real musicians, who are hired through a local talent agent

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The rumble of Christmas Tubas, not the roar of jets, echoes through the parking deck at Raleigh-Durham International Airport.

In Terminal A (flat?), between the tunnel escalator and the security line, a jazz trio sends passengers off with holiday zip.

Terminal C (sharp?) hosted a dulcimer player and a swing band last week. Next month it'll get bluegrass and "acoustic fusion."

No, that's not what fuels those noisy airplane engines on takeoff.

It's an annual offering of the airport, which is paying musicians to play Christmas standards and other holiday harmonies on 10 high-traffic days from Thanksgiving week until Christmas Eve.

"We do this every year to bring a little of the holiday spirit into the terminals," airport spokeswoman Mindy Hamlin said. "Holiday travel can be stressful, so we wanted to lighten things up a bit."

The airport hires the musicians through a local talent agent, Hamlin said. The next performances are scheduled for Dec. 20-24.

The most recent gigs were Sunday, when the players of the tubas, euphoniums and jazz instruments made departures more relaxing and arrivals happier.

"It's beautiful," said Beth Davis, 29, an Arizona cosmetology instructor who brought her three young children to visit relatives in the Triangle. "After that long flight, it's very nice."

"It sounds very good," said her smiling son, Chase Hinson, 7. "It's Christmas tunes. I like it."

Sitting on a nearby bench in the atrium of the airport's parking deck, a mother and daughter nodded and sang along with the Christmas Tubas' rendition of "Go Tell It on the Mountain."

Travelers passing on a people-mover stared and smiled. One lovey couple unlocked their gaze long enough to take in the 21 players clad in Santa hats. A departing passenger leaned over the second-level rail and tapped in time to "Here We Come A-Caroling."

"Isn't this nice?" said John Van Metre, 66, of Durham, awaiting his daughter's arrival from Phoenix. "It's too bad that people are in a hurry and they can't stop and listen a while. But they still heard it, and they'll remember."

Inside Terminal A, Raj and Banani Mishra enjoyed the velvet vibes of the Tony Galiani Trio with their toddler son, Sarthak.

"This is fun," said Mrs. Mishra, 32, as she rocked her son to the beat of the jazz. "It was exciting to walk in and hear music."

A few travelers took the time to jot down a journal comment.

"This is fabulous!" wrote Jen French of Durham. "What a great idea. Should do it all year round."

The airport has no such plans, Hamlin said. But it sure makes for a cool yule, y'all.

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