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Mike Devol of Greensky Bluegrass perform at The Westcott Theater on Sunday night.

Photo: Chris Janjic

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Bluegrass virtuosos wow Westcott with craft

By Leah Harrison
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Greensky Bluegrass, a Michigan bluegrass quintet, fuses jam band-like influences into their unique style of newgrass music.

Greensky Bluegrass appears relaxed, almost listless on stage. But the ear contradicts the eye as soon as their fingers pluck the first strings. In a show of careful craftsmanship, the youthful Michigan outfit served up a sonic smorgasbord Sunday evening at the Westcott Theater.

These boys embody a number of traditional bluegrass qualities—a five-piece band, impressive technique, vocals at once percussive and drawn out—but several aspects typical of the genre remain purposefully absent: few old ballads are among their repertoire, the banjo isn't featured very often and no high, lonesome voice. Their name projects some contradiction, so the Bill Monroe-esque Mandolin tremolo often sits adjacent the dobro's exploration of an Indian raga. You could call them newgrass with a heavy jam band influence. But their dizzying skill far exceeds most other bands in that category.

The Greensky Bluegrass contingent turned out at Westcott, on the band's third trip to Syracuse. Their chops were immediately evident, especially in Paul Hoffman's case. Hoffman's Mandolin picking was a marvel for someone so young, his skill lending theatrical depth to a fairly untheatrical performance. Hoffman uncharacteristically sat on a stool because of an ankle injury, and pointed out that the stool enables storytelling, though he wasn't exactly garrulous.

The opening number also included a virtuosic dobro solo from Anders Beck, and Dave Bruzza's

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