

Sultans of String wow large Canora audience

Young musicians were inspired, accomplished musicians offered high praise and the rest of the audience was well entertained, when the Sultans of String performed at the Canora Composite School on February 19.

Among the approximately 125 members of the audience, was 11-year-old Kelsey Kosheluk of Preeceville, who is described as an enthusiastic student of the violin. He was thrilled with opportunity to see Chris McKhool in concert and to meet with him after the performance. McKhool is the bandleader of the Sultans of String and just recently received a Juno nomination for his solo CD entitled *FiddleFire*.

In addition to receiving encouragement from McKhool and the band, Kosheluk's admiration for the Sultans was reaffirmed when his own violin teacher, Vic Mullen, a professional musician in his own right, used glowing terms of praise for McKhool and the band. Originally from the east coast, Mullen performed with many bands across North America, including more than 10 years with *Don Messer's Jubilee* on CBC Television. Mullen has retired to Preeceville.

As entertainers, the Sultans of String brought to Canora a fiery brand of music seldom made by stringed instruments in this area. The Sultans offered an energized adventure through Latin, Middle Eastern, Gypsy, jazz and folk rhythms.

Lorne Kopelchuk, a member of the audience who also happens to be Kosheluk's grandfather, mused that after all that wonderful, lively fiddle music, he didn't hear even one Ukrainian "Kolomayka."

The performance was excellent, said Kopelchuk. It was truly a privilege to have a group of this calibre perform in a small community like Canora.

The performance by the bandleader on his six-stringed violin (violins usually have four strings) offered a memorable experience as McKhool demonstrated why he was nominated for a Juno Award, he said.

McKhool used the extended range of his six-string violin to perform an unforgettable number from the group's first CD called *Luna*. The album title and the music refers to the story of a young male orca named Luna, which became a media sensation in 2001 when it moved into Nootka Sound on B.C.'s west coast. The Mowachaht First Nation people claimed that the whale was the reincarnation of their recently-deceased Chief Ambrose Maminna. While

As one of the organizers said, the Canora audience recalled the media story and felt a connection to it. The crowd became absolutely silent as McKhool drew the hauntingly beautiful whale songs out from his six-stringed violin.

Another piece that resonated with the audience was music performed for a documentary about the horses of Sable Island.

Other members of the four-piece band are: Eddie Paton, known as rumba flamenco wizard on the guitar; Drew Birston, the bass master; and Chendy Leon, the Cuban percussionist.

The glowing feedback was instantaneous when the band members mingled with the audience after the performance, said Dorothy Korol, president of the Canora Arts Council, which sponsored the performance as part of its Stars for Saskatchewan series. As audience members

shook the performers' hands, they expressed awe and delight. Paton, the lead guitarist, was told "his hands danced over the strings."

The Sultans of String are spending the month of February performing in centres across Saskatchewan as part of the band's engagement with the Organization of Saskatchewan Arts Councils. The Stars for Saskatchewan tour is part of the groups cross-Canada tour which will last well into the spring, when the Sultans will release the next CD called *Yalla Yalla*.

The Sultans' performance was the second in the series for Canora. The third and final performance of the season will be on March 10 when the Canora Arts Council will present Mike Stevens and Raymond McLain.

During the Sultan's time on stage, McKhool spoke very highly of the upcoming show, describing seeing a Stevens and McLain performance as a rare opportunity.

