

event!

January 16, 2009

Friday edition

quick hit

What: The Sultans of String in concert

Where: Creekside Theatre, 10241 Bottom Wood Lake Road, Lake Country

When: Saturday, 7:30 p.m.

Tickets: \$18 general admission, \$16 students and seniors, group of four tickets \$56, call 250-766-9309. Also at the theatre box office one hour prior to show time if still available.

Info: go to www.creeksidetheatre.com



Music addict

Sultans of String mix it up, says member Chris McKool

By CHRIS STANFORD

Chris McKool never has to worry about forgetting the words.

The virtuoso violinist and the rest of the Sultans of String bring their innovative and expressive instrumental music to the Creekside Theatre in Lake Country on Jan. 17, and although they eschew lyrics, their music won't be lacking in diversity.

Nominees for the 2007 Canadian Folk Music Award as best instrumental group, the Sultans are McKool on six-string violin, Eddie Paton on guitar and Drew Birston on bass. With a style variously described as a mix of rumba and Romani or gypsy jazz, along with tinges of the Middle East stirred with Spanish flavours, their music might be just the perfect thing to chase away a cold, snowy Okanagan winter.

"We take our audiences on a musical/cultural journey across Canada and around the world. What we really love to do is to reflect Canadian culture back to Canadians as well as bring in sounds that come from around the world," said McKool from his home base of Toronto.

"Sounds and melodies and rhythms from around the world come to Canada through immigration and become part of our

Canadian music . . . we love to mix musical styles."

Although he also plays guitar and sings in other projects not connected with the Sultans of String, the 40-year-old McKool finds this mode of expression to be tremendously rewarding.

"For me this really captures where I am in my life. I really enjoy improvising," he said. Although he says the Sultans usually have the intro and ending of each number in place before they start, they often end up spontaneously combining ideas and enjoy seeing where it takes them musically.

Of Lebanese extraction on his father's side, McKool grew up musically hearing the sounds of the east and the west. With formative years spent between the cultural melting-pots of Montreal and Toronto, his keen ear has assimilated the tones and rhythms of many different styles of music.

"Toronto is a pretty special place," he said. "Given the size of it . . . we really get to experiment in a way that is unlike many places on earth."

McKool, who plays various permutations of the violin with everything from four to six strings, ascribes the power of music with broadening his horizons.

"In a lot of ways music has opened up all the doors that have made my life special and it's provided me with a way to com-

municate with people," he said.

An early influence on the Torontonians was the early jazz music of the '30s and '40s, especially the upbeat, innovative style practised by bands like the Quintet of the Hot Club of France.

"I was learning that world of music before we formed the Sultans of String," he said. "That music is so addictive and so much fun to play, it's 'rocket music' . . . you have to be completely clear and awake and aware when you're performing it."

"I started falling in love with that music and enjoying it as way to get my fingers around playing the violin but also falling in love with the melody."

According to McKool, although he has been playing with the other band members "for about five years," the 'Sultans were only "fine-tuned" with the release of their 2007 CD, *Luna*.

"When I started playing with these guys we discovered that everything we played was more fun as a rumba," he said. "It just oozes rhythm and danceability."

They're currently working on a new release slated for late spring of 2009, tentatively entitled *Yalla Yalla*, which roughly translates from Lebanese as 'come on, hurry up.'

"We've got a lot of upbeat stuff on the new record," said McKool.

Chris McKool

The new disc features the Sultans' characteristically diverse sound – the exotic Middle Eastern stringed instrument called an oud features prominently. "Part of what I really like about the band is the ability to mix things up and to bring in sounds and flavours from all over," said McKool. "This band is a great platform . . . it's fun for both the audience and us as performers."

Besides the concert program at the Creekside Theatre, the Sultans of String will also play a number of special outreach shows in South Okanagan schools in the following days in Cawston, Osoyoos and Oliver — something that McKool has a fondness for. "What's special with the concerts in schools is that we can talk a little bit more with the students about what it's like to be a musician, what's it's like to travel around and learn from other musicians and cultures."

Whatever their audience, the Sultans of String don't just cross musical boundaries, they break them down as they go and McKool certainly doesn't see that as being unusual in this day and age.

"Any typical iPod these days can have a dozen different styles of music on it — that's how we live as people, we like variety."

