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LAKE COUNTRY CALENDAR

Melding the sounds of the Sultanate

By Chris Law - Lake Country Calendar

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Many of the world's greatest creations begin with a simple purpose or premise but achieve some measure of renown through the creator's vision, determination and ability. A world-class chef for example, can turn even a humble plate of spaghetti and meatballs into a meal to be remembered for a lifetime.

On a grander scale an architect is able to create a bona fide piece of art out of a structure that really only requires four walls and a roof to be functional; the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain is a prime example of this.

This concept of pushing the limits of what is possible with one's craft is what drives Chris McKhool and bandmates Eddie Paton and Drew Birston, who make up the acclaimed musical group Sultans of String. One minute McKhool might be jamming out a rendition of The Who's classic Pinball Wizard on his six-string electric violin and the next he could be using his instrument to imitate the serene yet lonely echoing call of a lost killer whale calling out to its family.

As far as the band's sound is concerned, the Sultans of String borrow from musical traditions found in all corners of the globe. African and Cuban drumming, celtic styles, gypsy-jazz, pop, and rumba flamenco are fused together to tell Canadian stories and to celebrate the country's ethnic diversity.

"I love exploring my instrument and what I can do with it. With a six-string violin I have an extended range of sound and I can do running bass lines, write cello parts and play as my own string section," says McKhool. "I love being in that place where I feel creative and it's a passion my bandmates share."

Their desire to continually reach new places with their music is so great that even the band members themselves don't always know what to expect from one of their shows. Improvisation is such a big part of the show, says McKhool. Expanding on that idea, he goes on to say that with many of the band's songs only the beginning and ending remain the same from one performance to the next.

One thing that is consistent from gig to gig is the contagious nature of the energy that the group brings to the stage.

"The thing about our shows is that we have a lot of fun playing and our audiences see it and it sort of rubs off on them," says McKhool.

McKhool says that for himself and his bandmates maintaining complete artistic license is critical to band's enjoyment of music and, so far, maintaining a profile under the radar of mainstream radio has been the only way to ensure that their creative freedom is preserved.

As an independent act, one of the biggest challenges Sultans of String face is finding their audience. While the band has only been together for a short while, their debut CD Luna reached the top of the national radio charts for the "International/World" category. They've also received regular airplay on the CBC, which has given them some much-appreciated exposure, but as McKhool puts it "(promotion) is a nut we're still trying to crack."

When the Sultans of String hit the stage at the Creekside Theatre at 7:30 p.m. on January 17, it will be as part of their first nation-wide tour. General admission for the show is \$18 or \$16 for students and seniors. Group packages of four tickets are also available for \$56. Tickets can be purchased by calling 250-766-9309.



The Sultans of String perform January 17 at the Creekside Theatre.

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