



Sultans of String play Melfort

By Chris Putnam

Toronto-based musical group the Sultans of String lived up to their name at a concert in Melfort last Wednesday night, drawing cheers and accolades from a normally restrained crowd.

The four-man instrumental group, brought in by the Melfort Arts Council for a stop on a national tour, is comprised of band leader Chris McKhool (six-string violin), Eddie Paton (guitar), Drew Birston (bass), and Chendy Leon (percussion). Billed as "Canada's ambassadors of musical diversity," the band flows through original songs covering half a dozen styles from around the world with each show.

"I joke sometimes that I have musical ADD," said McKhool.

In his other life, McKhool is a well-known children's entertainer, his new CD *FiddleFire!* being recently nominated for a 2009 Juno award. The other members of the group have similarly impressive resumes, each in different areas of specialization. Their onstage performance shows influence from each of them.

"I think all of us bring different things from everything we've learned playing with different artists and doing other tours," said McKhool, "and we decided to put together a group that could bring together all



The Sultans of String, an eclectic, internationally-styled Toronto band, thrilled an audience at Melfort's North East Leisure Centre last Wednesday.

these influences."

"I think a lot of bands are really amazing at playing one style of music and really nailing that, and going very far with it. What we like to do is to see what happens when you mash together Cuban percussion, and Spanish flamenco, and east-coast Celtic, and New York jazz, and Gypsy jazz—just throw it all together and see what comes out."

The result is something lively, rhythmic, and instantly accessible. The group's unique combination of styles has earned it a bevy of awards over the past few years and sent its debut album *Luna* to the number one spot in the "International" and "World/Folk" categories on national Top Ten radio charts.

The local audience at the North East Leisure Centre on Wednesday was similarly enthralled. The show inspired cheers, whistles, and at least one instance of

spontaneous dancing. An extended standing ovation brought the group back onstage at the end of the performance for an encore.

A favorite part of the job for the performers is arriving in communities such as Melfort and meeting the people there.

"That's one of the coolest things about being a musician, is you've got an excuse to travel all over the place," said McKhool. "I mean, when would I ever travel up to La Ronge or Melfort unless I had an excuse? And this is the best excuse I could have to come visit your community."

A national tour taking the group to each unique corner of the country is an appropriate fit for a band with such eclectic musical tastes.

"For me," said McKhool, "the enjoyment is in the plurality, in the multiculturalism of it."