



~ Arts & Entertainment ~



Diversity sets group apart

WAYNE GIBSON
of The Clarion

A concert of genre-defying diversity is practically guaranteed when the Sultans of String come to Kindersley tonight.

Latin, jazz, folk, Middle-Eastern - the elements of each can be found in the band's music. Bandleader Chris McKhool on a six-string violin heads a four-man ensemble including flamenco guitarist Eddie Paton, bass player Drew Birston, and Cuban percussionist Chendy Leon.

Credit Chris McKhool's mixed heritage for some of the influence - his mother grew up in Cairo - but the Ottawa-raised musician said he's always been exposed to an eclectic variety of music.

"It's more like a gradual evolution," he said. "As a musician who has played with a number of different bands, one thing that I find is that I'm always learning about different kinds of music from around the world."

"I love learning because it keeps me growing all the time

as a musician. Also for me, I do a lot of work with young audiences around environmental and multi-cultural issues. It's almost like musical social work to help bring people together and realize we're all part of one human family."

Other players have come and gone with Sultans of String over the years, and McKhool has a story for how he linked with each of his current band members.

"I feel really fortunate at this point in my life to have met all these people," he said.

The last two years have brought success on several levels for the band. Their debut CD, *Luna*, reached the top of Canada's Top 10 radio charts and was recognized for several high profile industry awards, including nominations from the Independent Music Awards, Canadian Folk Music Awards, and Festivals and Events Ontario.

The band's inclusion in the Stars for Saskatchewan showcase is the second time McKhool has travelled the province with the Organiza-

tion of Saskatchewan Arts Councils (OSAC). He looks back fondly on that experience with his former group Fiddle-Fire, acknowledging that a few of the 2009 stops with Sultans of String will be return visits.

"It was a fantastic tour. The people I met were some of the most exciting people I've met," he said.

"What the OSAC tour does is it exposes us to a whole group of people that would probably never hear of us. It helps us build our audience. It's great what the organization does for artists in the province."

The Sultans of String compose most of their own music. McKhool said he enjoys the collaborative nature of the group, and the ways in which the various styles are blended.

The band performs at the Norman Ritchie Community Centre for one show only, tonight (7:30 p.m.), the fifth of seven shows in the Kindersley and District Arts Council 2008-09 season.



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