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Music Review: Sultans of String - Move

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Pigeonholing Canadian 2010 Juno Award nominees **Sultans of String** is kind of difficult if not impossible. The band's instrumentation—six string violin, guitars, bass and percussion—is not the typical ensemble. The music they play combines elements of jazz with music from all over the world: the **Middle East and South America**, Gypsy rhythms with Canadian roots, Flamenco and even a little transformed folk rock. You could call it world music, if what you mean is literally "world" and not merely one little corner of that world. It is no accident that when you download their latest album *Move* from iTunes, the genre is listed as "other." Listening to the album is like taking a musical cruise around the world with stops at major ports of call.

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Of the twelve pieces on the album, nine are original compositions by violinist **Chris McKhool** and guitarist **Kevin Lauberté** and one by Lauberté alone; one is by bassist **Drew Birston**; and the final is the **Neil Young** classic "**Heart of Gold**" "rediscovered" by the Sultans as a rumba. This last features vocals by **Amanda Walther** and Sheila Carabine, folk singers from the group Dala. It is a perfect illustration of the band's eclectic approach to generic experimentation. This is a band that looks to take chances. When you revamp an icon, you had better be right. Listen to what they do with it; they're right. The other vocal on the album is Birston's "To You," which he sings with his wife, **Amanda Martinez**. He describes it as a "journey through the streets of Havana, Cuba where a couple finds new love." Pablosky Rosales joins in both songs on the *tres*, the Cuban guitar.



The album opens with "Andalucía," a salute to the birthplace of flamenco which percussionist **Rosendo Leon** notes, blends "Arabic, Roman, Sephardic Jewish, Indigenous Andalusian and Gypsy cultures." Its echoes of all these diverse traditions in a unified composition are a brilliant introduction to the rest of the album. "**Dos Guitarras**" is an opportunity for some dueling Spanish guitar solo work for Lauberté and **Eddie**

Paton. *Montreal* adds guest trumpeter **Kevin Turcotte**, who also appears on "Ernie's Bounce," an example of the band's swinging straight ahead jazz. It even has a little scat from Birston.

"Emerald Swing" begins with a haunting theme and then morphs into a roots folk dance with some help from the mandolin of **Ken Whiteley**. "Road to Kfarmishki" is a salute to roots of a different kind with its distinctive Arabic influences. **Ernie Tollar's** flute adds another voice to the mix. "Orquidea" takes the band to Brazil for a little bossa nova and "Return to Lisboa" is an exciting rumba. The album ends with "Nacimiento," a song written, according to McKhool, about "the journey to parenthood." It is an impassioned melody that bursts into a rhythmic crescendo and then ends softly with the beating heart of the newborn, as though paralleling the cycle of birth, taking its cue from classical program music.

As you can see from *Move's* variety, there is little point in trying to tie the Sultans of String down to any one musical genre, and why should anyone want to? When a band can do so many things so well, why try and limit their range? Let them experiment--more power to them. It will only make the expectations for what they will come up with next that much greater.


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