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They Are The Sultans Of String

Toronto world music group make a MOVE with new CD

By Kerry Doole

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They've become firm favourites on the local scene, and now Sultans of String are taking their very entertaining and musically accomplished act around the globe. In the months ahead, they'll play numerous dates across Canada and in the U.S., then head to the U.K. for a mini-tour that'll include a performance at the famed Celtic Connections Festival. "We're really excited about that," group violinist and co-founder Chris McKhool told Tandem in a recent interview. "Celtic Connections is known as the place to check out new international talent." The band has also received invitations to play in Australia. Sultans of String are almost impossible to categorize as anything other than a world music group. They tour the globe stylistically, switching with ease between such diverse genres as gypsy jazz, salsa, bossa nova, Celtic, rumba flamenco, Arabic folk, and jazz. Such eclecticism does pose a challenge for the five members of SoS, as McKhool acknowledges. "The truth is I sometimes I get frustrated when I'm trying to solo in 10 different styles on the violin. I think 'why am I making life so damn hard?' It can seem ridiculous to try to be proficient at everything. The one thing lightening it up is that we try not to take it too seriously. We're not trying to play authentic East coast Celtic or flamenco-puro. We are just taking these influences. The song form and sensibility has more pop to it than anything."



The Sultans of String


Such diversity displeases some purists, but McKhool pays them little mind. "Once you go down the road of trying to please those people it is pretty much an impossible task. No matter how deeply you go into the genre, someone will think you're not pure enough. There's just no pleasing the jazz, classical and world music police, so why try?"

The group has, however, won real respect from their peers and most music critics. They've won multiple folk and world music awards, and their 2009 album Yalla Yalla earned a Juno nomination. Expect similar positive response to their imminent third album, MOVE. We have an advance copy, and can confirm that it's a fine piece of work and arguably their best yet.

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