



June 2007 Archives

[Home](#)
[Archives](#)
[CD & DVD Reports](#)
[Photo Galleries](#)
[Contact Us](#)
[Links](#)


Sultans of String – Luna CD release



June 8, 2007 • Hugh's Room • Toronto

Around the Mediterranean and across the Atlantic, to the shores of Lake Ontario

by Sebastian Cook with photos by Mike Colyer

The last CD with the title *Luna* of which I am aware, oddly enough, was crafted by Toronto-based six-string bass wizard Marc Rogers. This karmic coincidence, along with having hosted a wonderful Sultans of String performance at Trane Studio back in April, had me particularly excited for the unveiling of this groundbreaking gypsy/world/flamenco/jazz trio's new disc on a steamy June night at Hugh's Room.

Sure enough, a packed room and apparent air-conditioning malfunction combined to create a feeling that one could have been in Madrid or Cairo. The atmosphere was heightened by the presence of CBC Radio Two for a *Canada Live* broadcast. And the band clearly felt this energy from the get-go.

Violinist Chris McKhool carried the show's early moments with some virtuoso playing that was by turns subtle, frenetic and piercing — shades of Stephane Grappelli, Billy Bang and Jean-Luc Ponty. Guitarist Kevin Laliberté layered his unique sound into the mix; combining the entrancing rhythmic urgency of flamenco, the percussive finger-picking of an acoustic bluesman, and a jazzman's sense of tempo shifts and experimental verve. Drew Birston had the sound of an upright emanating from his electric bass.

Appropriately, McKhool introduced the next song as a 'rumba norte' with a tribute to the diversity of Toronto's



Chris McKhool

Ads by Google

Rogers All Day Concert

See The Roots, Bedouin Soundclash, Bad Brains, Little Brother & more.
RogersPicnic.com

Free Jazz Music

Acoustic performances from 115+ of today's top artists. Free from AOL!
www.aol.ca/sessions

Elixir® Strings - How to:

Step-by-step instructions on stringing your guitar.
www.elixirstrings.com

Music Events

Toronto music events and venues. Excellent info guide and more.
www.toronto.com/Arts

tribute to the diversity of Toronto's musical diaspora of which this band is so much a reflection; this was the occasion for the first guest of the evening, Ernie Tollar on saxophone, to add another layer of harmonic exploration and boundary-pushing alongside McKhool's pulsating high-register fiddling.

The Maritimes-inspired "Rainflower" started out slow and folky, cranking into an infectious vibe of "Kitchen Party" that would not have been out of place at a ceilidh or highland wedding. The smoothness of Birston's bass lines balanced the up-tempo rumba/flamenco stomp of the other strings, with percussionist Jeff Wilson providing some beautifully ambient-sounding beats. The ode to Sable Island, Nova Scotia which followed was as shapeshifting as the beaches that inspired it, reminding me of two of the all-time great guitar/fiddle duos, Jerry Garcia/David Grisman and Grappelli/Django Reinhardt.

"Contessa" featured the always-radiant Amanda Martinez, cast perfectly in the role of gypsy-jazz diva. This number featured a transition that could have come across as contrived but was executed brilliantly; from Latin-jazz with Martinez singing *en español* to a more folk-inspired sound with English lyrics.

To close the first set, the Sultans gave a 2007 psychedelic gypsy-jazz treatment to The Who's classic "Pinball Wizard". Given that this concert featured a 2000s twist to a style born in 1920s Paris, the historical transition and sense of placement seemed quite visionary.

The second half of the show started with a straight-ahead flamenco number which once again demonstrated Laliberté's grasp of the roots of his craft. As the name suggests, "Lisbon" then added a distinct touch of Portuguese fado to the mix. "Sunday" featured a brilliant bit of call-and-response, high-low interplay between McKhool and Laliberté. Following was the show's high point for musicality, an absolutely stunning Egyptian "sai" number with local oud master Bassam Bishara that once again brought percussionist Wilson to the fore.



Kevin Laliberté



Drew Birston

Skipping northeastward across the Mediterranean, "My Squid Has a Rash" satisfied lovers of classic French gypsy-jazz, a la Club Django of which McKhool is a member. It was modernized by some smartly dissonant guitar work from Laliberté and a funky shuffle beat from Wilson. On the trans-Atlantic tip, we then heard "Weather Update", a tribute to primordial fusion outfit Weather Report with Birston serving up some delicious jazz-funk bass work and Tollar turning up the heat with a New York-meets-Cairo sax solo.

Tollar's wife Maryem lent her truly haunting background vocal stylings to the main set's closing number "Alhambra" that brought back a memory of the Gipsy Kings who performed the last concert I saw at the old Ontario Place Forum. Fifteen years later, it was fascinating to witness flamenco-world music with a jazz-psychedelic twist still so alive and well in Toronto.

Sultans of String

Chris McKhool – acoustic & electric violin & fiddle
 Kevin Laliberté – acoustic guitar
 Drew Birston – electric & upright bass

Guests

Jeff Wilson – percussion & drums
 Ernie Tollar – sax & woodwinds
 Amanda Martinez – vocals
 Bassam Bishara – oud
 Maryem Tollar – vocals

www.sultansofstring.com

We welcome your comments and feedback

Sebastian Cook

• • • • •

Mike Colyer

sebastiancook@thelivemusicreport.com

• •

mikecolyer@thelivemusicreport.com

•

The Live Music Report

reporters@thelivemusicreport.com

| [Home](#) | [Archives](#) | [CD & DVD Reports](#) | [Photo Galleries](#) | [Contact](#) | [Links](#) |

Please contact us to secure permission for use of any material found on this website.
 © The Live Music Report – 2007