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ENTERTAINMENT

Make way for the Sultans of String



By Jessica Ryan, Camrose Canadian
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The Sultans of String will bring world music melodies and rhythms to the Lougheed Centre Nov. 20. (Supplied)

The denizens of the Camrose area have a chance to set aside cowboy hats and country tunes for an afternoon and experience world music with the Sultans of String at the Lougheed Centre Nov. 20.

The Sultans of String have been criss-crossing the continent, shining a light on Canadian stories - whether it be about Luna the whale on the West Coast or Sable Island on the East Coast – and experimenting with Spanish flamenco, gypsy jazz from Eastern Europe, Cuban rhythms, East Coast Celtic melodies – the list is as long as all the musical influences that come to roost in Canada through immigration.

After testing the limits of orchestration on their fourth album (2013's Symphony), the Sultans have joined creative forces with Anwar Khurshid (virtuoso sitar player heard on movie soundtracks including Life of Pi) and delved into South Asian sounds and rhythms to produce Subcontinental Drift, released this September.

Violinist and band leader Chris McKhool enjoys the way the band's musical diversity exposes them to audiences who might not otherwise be exposed to some of their sounds.

"In a way it's almost like musical social work or something," he laughed. "You're used to a certain sound? Well, okay, we've performed that, but now we're going to tease you a little bit and bring to you something kind of different that makes you have to concentrate a little harder."

Though nowadays, McKhool said, people have eclectic musical tastes, "especially the iPod generation where you've got all the music in the known universe all in your iPod and you put it on shuffle and then who knows what gets played after what."

One of the roles the Sultans of String take on is to showcase talented world music performers living in Canada who might not otherwise reach a larger audience. On the other hand, performing with an artist like Khurshid led to the chance for the Sultans to play for the Indian and Turkish consulates at their recent Toronto CD release concert.

At that concert the Sultans were able to highlight a group of families in Toronto trying to raise money to sponsor a Syrian refugee family and encourage the audience to visit a link on their website and learn more.

"It was a really great opportunity to focus the energy of a large number of people towards a really good cause and seeing something that we can all do to kind of help make the world a little bit better," said McKhool. "One of the most powerful things that music can do is bring people together under one roof with one vision."

Gaining a more global perspective on the world and experiencing the joy of playing music is something the Sultans of String try to model for audiences, particularly the younger members.

"When you see musicians from diverse backgrounds playing together...it's modelling working together to make the world a better place," said McKhool. "We use our experiences to figure out the world and understand the world we live in and kids need that as much as adults do, if not more, because they have so much learning to do about how they fit in."

The Sultans of String will appear on the Lougheed Centre stage at 8 p.m. on Nov. 20, Visit camroselive.ca or call 780-608-2922 for details.

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