



Review: Sultans of String, Subcontinental Drift

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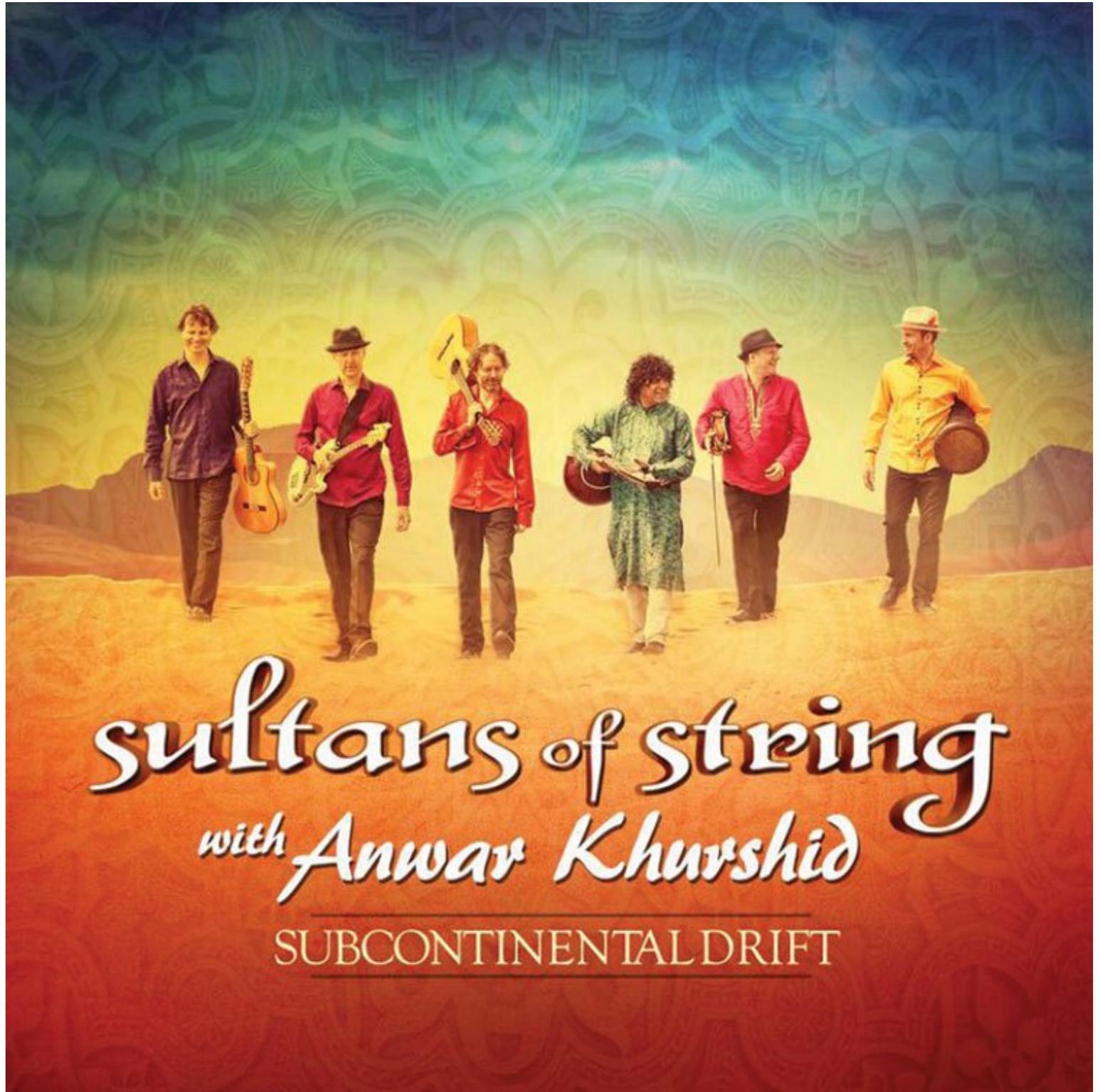


By *Kenny Berkowitz*

There's something essentially Canadian about the Sultans of Strings' *Subcontinental Drift* (<http://amzn.to/1SMhPOB>), with its swirl of influences from Cuba, France, India, Ireland, Lebanon, Pakistan, and Spain. Based in Toronto, the band has been around for eight years, led by Chris McKhool (six-string violin) and Kevin Laliberté (nylon- and steel-string guitar), who co-write much of the quintet's original material. Over time, they've grown increasingly ambitious, especially on 2014's *Symphony*, and now, with the addition of Anwar Khurshid (sitar), they've transformed themselves again, expanding their reach to create a joyful mix of East and West. You can hear it in an unlikely cover of Bob Dylan's "Blowin' in the Wind," sung in English and Urdu, but rooted in Afro-Indo-Caribbean rhythms by Drew Birston (bass), Rosendo "Chendy" León (percussion), and Eddie Paton (nylon-string guitar). You can hear it in the trad-fiddle tune "The Rakes of Mallow," which was brought from

Ireland to India two centuries ago, when it was adapted into a prayer to the Hindi goddess Meenakshi. You can hear it in Laliberté-McKhool tunes like “A Place to Call Home” and “A Heart Does What It Does,” which bring a subcontinental sensibility to North American singer-songwriting, with each side making the other stronger.

Sultans of String succeeds brilliantly, thinking like classical musicians and listening like jazzmen. It helps that they have two conservatory-trained guitarists to keep driving the rhythm, and with support from arts councils, in Ontario and Toronto, they’ve found the freedom to put all these worlds together, performing with a spirit of playfulness, of openness, of warmth, that makes *Subcontinental Drift* such a beautiful surprise.



(<http://amzn.to/1SMhPOB>)

Comments