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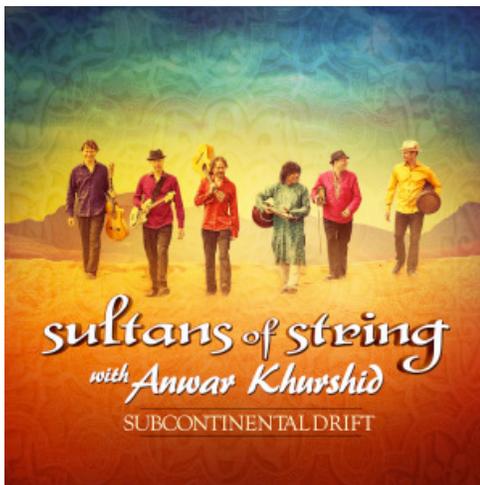
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Music Review: Sultans of String Featuring Anwar Khurshid



By Samir Shukla

Subcontinental Drift is Sultans of String's fifth album further evolving the band's meld of folk, African, flamenco, Celtic, Arabic and roots music. Bandleader Chris McKhool grew up in a Lebanese-Egyptian home in Canada and the other globally-connected musicians in the band include guitarist Kevin Laliberté, bassist Drew Birston, Cuban percussionist Rosendo Chendy Leon, and guitarist Eddie Paton. The new recording also features guest musician and sitar master Anwar Khurshid, adding Hindustani music into the band's multi-ethnic adventurism. Khurshid is a Pakistani heritage sitar teacher and composer in Canada who was featured on the soundtracks of the films *Life of Pi* and *Kama Sutra*. "There is something really magical about joining world music rhythms that we often play, but with pop sensibilities and forms and lengths, and blending that with the music of the East," said bandleader/fiddler McKhool in a press release.

The Canadian combo is adept at weaving genres and musical traditions, and the latest effort *Subcontinental Drift* is the reward for listeners.

"Enter the Gate" is the first track on the album and is a showcase of the evocative music to follow in the rest of the recording. It's a track mixing all the elements of the band along with sitarist Khurshid adding the Indian Subcontinental drift, if you will.

In "Rakes of Mallow / Rouge River Valley" Khurshid shows off his vocal abilities scatting through the saptak, the series of swaras or seven notes of Hindustani music, while the band bursts into a Celtic reel.

"Ho Jamalo" is a traditional Sindhi song rewritten and sung by Khurshid with Sudanese vocalist Waleed Abdulhamid singing in his native dialect, adding a folky African element. The song is a jazzy, moody blend of Indian, African and rock. It may take a few listens for it to gel for some folks due to its varied dual vocals, but once absorbed, it opens a world of multilayered composing and playing.

"A Place to Call Home" is a warm, country-folk song evoking a longing for a place to belong.

"Blowin' In the Wind" is a version of the Bob Dylan classic that sounds good, and is a perkier version with Indian, Arabic, and percussive rhythms, but doesn't quite reach the somber and reflective power of the original. But of course, that's a tall order for anyone covering that song.

The track "Snake Charmer" evokes the snake charmers of the Subcontinent with fiddle, sinewy sitar, and guitar opening the doors to the charmers' seemingly magical and exotic world.

The Sindhi song "Parchan Shaal Panhwar" is sung by Shweta Subram and is a longing of a person's return to his native village, hoping for acceptance again after roaming the world. It's a lovely track with Khurshid adding support vocals while the band forms a twilight-evoking musical backdrop.

A couple of instrumentals, "Journey to Freedom" and "Subcontinental Drift" are perfect to add to a library of nighttime driving music.

"A Heart Does What It Does" is the final track in which Khurshid sings in Urdu about the frailties of the heart and love. It seems the perfect closing song for this recording.

- *Samir Shukla is Editor of Saathie Magazine*