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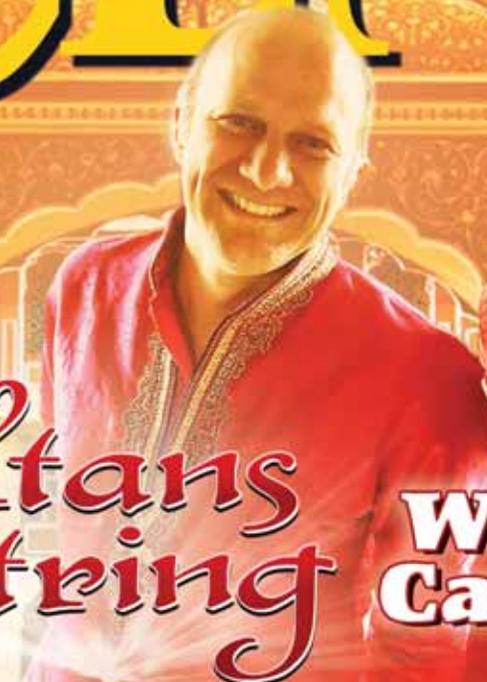
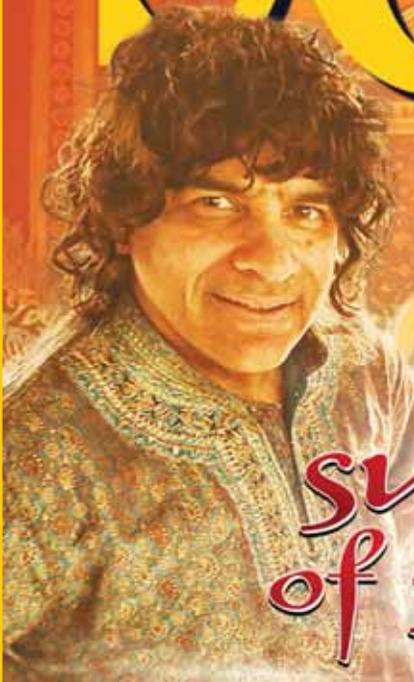
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# SCENE



*sultans  
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COVER★STORY

SULTANS OF STRING EXPAND THEIR SOUND

Since their formation as a duo comprised of Chris McKhool (six-string violin) and Kevin Laliberté (flamenco guitar), Sultans Of String have forged a global reputation as one of Canada's finest musical exports. As the band's roster of members has changed over time their open-minded creative spirit has remained constant.

The band has created an eclectic discography since its inception in 2004, building on the alchemy created by the magical mixture of Chris and Kevin's playing styles while working with a variety of musicians and even a symphony orchestra. Their latest release, *Subcontinental Drift* (Universal) continues in that vein as they collaborate with sitar master Anwar Kharshid.

The fact that Sultans Of String has been classified as a world-music project from its beginnings is unsurprising given the creative directions they have taken and the instrumentation they employ. The new album, however, not only succeeds as a collaboration with Kharshid but also seems to signal a growth in their sound that could indicate the world-music label

may be something they're outgrowing.

"They put us in the world music section because that's where we live. We're bringing influences from around the globe. I always think of it in a way as Canadian music because it's music that brings in the experiences of people from around the globe and that's really the Canadian experience. You come here and you bring your culture with you and you celebrate it and you celebrate other people's cultures as well. The problem is the terminology. Everything is world music. Anything that comes from a deep tradition is probably categorized as world music. The blues is world music," said McKhool.

McKhool's creative influences are richly varied due to his background in youth symphony orchestras and the incredible amount of music he's absorbed in the intervening years both as a musician and music lover. As they've developed their own signature sound, the work of Chris and Sultans Of String is proving to be as influential as those artists who guided McKhool himself as he grew artistically.

"I think this is the deepest we've gone into one genre on any album. This album to me is my favourite because I think we more legitimately dove into

one world or combined two worlds and created something new that had sort of an artistic focus through the whole album. Some of the influences are really obvious ones like Ravi Shankar, he created the world music genre by bringing his sitar to Woodstock and blowing people's minds open and Peter Gabriel, huge influence. He's the one that really inspired me to keep on looking deeper into the world of music, just so much incredible music to discover."

One of the most interesting tracks on the new album, 'Snake Charmer,' particularly seems to guide the way toward a more world-music/jazz amalgam that may indicate a path the band may explore further in future. Despite his schooling in the musical traditions he grew up in, Kharshid proved himself instinctively able to move spontaneously into the sonic fluidity that characterizes the track.

"Anwar's really well-trained and the beauty is to explore music with somebody like that and find challenges. It's almost like the kind of listening and responding that you do when you're playing jazz. You're listening to what someone's saying and you're responding to it in real time. The thing is, you can have ideas of where you want a song like 'Snake Charmer' to go but the only thing we know absolutely is the ending so if you end at the same time everyone goes 'Wow, they're really tight!'"

Sultans Of String are currently heading out to tour the new album and are already looking forward to other projects including a world-music Christmas album that McKhool indicates they're already 'knee-deep' in. Chris and Kevin are nonetheless still buzzing from the creative energy their collaboration with An-



SULTANS OF STRING – (L-R) ANWAR KHARSHID, CHRIS MCKHOOL AND KEVIN LALIBERTÉ – WILL CELEBRATE THE RELEASE OF *SUBCONTINENTAL DRIFT* AT THE AEOLIAN HALL

war has given them and see the experience as almost a one of a kind in terms of spiritual enrichment.

"When Kevin and I and Anwar starting writing these songs together in my garage a year and a half ago, that time we had together creating music and improvising music spontaneously together was almost like a balm on our souls. Anwar was just bringing this space of peace and happiness and positive energy. Coming off the road, Kevin and I were both really needing that. Just hanging out with him has been a great experience musically and otherwise. There are songs on the record that are different from anything we've ever done."

- Rod Nicholson

**i** Aeolian Hall. The Sultan of Strings, wsg Anwar Kharshid, perform on Saturday, November 7, 8:00 p.m. For tickets and info, call (519) 672-7950

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