

# Cleveland Classical CD Review: Sultans of String — Symphony

September 17, 2013 in [Reviews](#)

by Mike Telin



Known as “Canada’s ambassadors of musical diversity”, the [Sultans of String](#) make a return visit to Cleveland this Sunday, September 22nd beginning at 7:00 pm at Nighttown. If you missed the group’s Nighttown performance back in January you have a second chance to hear the Sultans’ blend of Spanish Flamenco, Arabic folk, Cuban rhythms, and French Manouche

Gypsy-jazz that earned them a 2010 Juno Award nomination as well as being named the *World Group of the Year* at the Canadian Folk Music Awards (2012). The group has also been nominated for the 2013 *World Group of the Year* at the 2013 SiriusXM Canadian Indie Awards. In February of this year, bandleader and violinist Chris McKhool was awarded the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee Medal for his work in building community, and for his contributions to Canada.

The group’s Nighttown performance also coincides with the release of their latest CD, *Symphony*, available in stores today distributed by Sony/Red through Red River Entertainment. Suffice it to say, this is a CD that goes beyond a gratuitous synthesizing of diverse musical styles and influences with sugarcoated orchestral arrangements. No, *Symphony* truly celebrates them with intelligent arrangements by Sultans Chris McKhool, Kevin Laliberté and Eddie Paton as well as Bret Menezes. And the engaging orchestrations are by arranger/composer Rebecca Pellett. The orchestra, comprised of members of the Toronto Symphony, National Ballet Orchestra and Canadian Opera Company Orchestra under the direction of

Jamie Hopkings, is superb throughout.

In addition to Sultan band members Chris McKhool, Kevin Laliberté and Eddie Paton, Drew Birston and Rosendo "Chendy" Leon, the CD also includes guest performances by Bassam Bishara, oud, James Hill, ukulele, Larry Larson, trumpet, Paddy Moloney (the Chieftains), pennywhistle, and vocalists Dala-Amanda Walther & Sheila Carabine.

*Symphony* truly captures the group's wildly popular symphony pops show, which was developed under the guidance of native Cleveland and Cincinnati Pops conductor John Morris Russell. In fact, the only thing I missed was hearing the reaction of a live audience.

Prior to the group's January performance at Nighttown, Chris McKhool told us that the project is an attempt to bridge the two worlds. "We find that classical music goes really well with world music. It sounds exciting and kind of exotic to people who have not heard those kinds of rhythms and melodies before. It's always a real treat for us to perform for those types of audiences so we thought the best way to reach a wider audience was through a recording."

Hopefully *Symphony* will get the Sultans the well-deserved recognition in the United States that they enjoy in Canada.

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com September 17, 2013*