

*Canada's ambassadors of musical diversity took Dryden Entertainment Series patrons on a journey around the world with their explorations of Latin, gypsy-jazz, middle eastern and folk rhythms. Above: percussionist Chendy Leon looks back to find bassist Drew Birston and violinist Chris McKhool engaged in a battle of showmanship.*

*By Chris Marchand*

There was perhaps no better cure for what ailed me, than The Sultans of String.

Clocking out early from a particularly mind-numbing city council meeting to wander into the show at intermission, I was assailed by the typical grumbling that everything was too loud - which I've come to recognize as a sign that I'm probably going to enjoy myself.

Indeed, I would.

Flamenco guitarist Eddie Paton opened the second set by himself, invoking memories of childhood mix-tapes with a cover of Rik Emmett's *Midsummer Night's Dream* - the ultimate Canadian acoustic guitar piece.

Joined thereafter by band leader Chris McKhool, the two launched into a soaring Celtic arrangement that highlighted the playful interaction between Paton's guitar and McKhool's haunting violin - produced with digital effects reminiscent of the late Oliver Schorer's masterpiece *Field Of Stars*.

Bassist Drew Birston and percussionist Chendy Leon returned to the stage, bringing with them new rhythmic voyages to far-off lands - from Afro-Cuban stylings to Middle Eastern fare.

Leon's powerful playing only served to reinforce the idea that I will ask for a Cajon (Afro-Peruvian box drum) for my birthday.

McKhool, who hails from Lebanese background, was a mischievous sprite, bounding all over the stage as he led his group through their pleasantly fast and loose compositions with frequent solo breaks.

It was music compelling and diverse enough to bridge the gap that singers most often fill with language. In my assessment, *Sultans of String* delivered one of the strongest shows of the 2008/09 Dryden Entertainment Series.

