

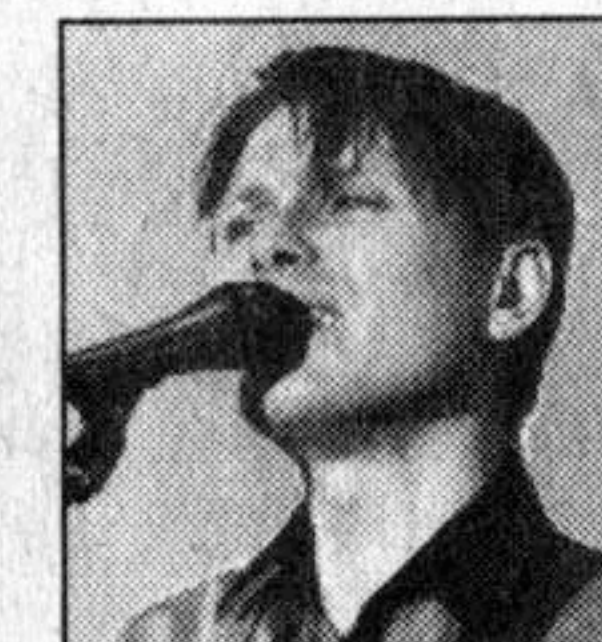
# ARTS

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timescolonist.com

**WEB EXTRA: Franz Ferdinand's new sound**  
 Musician says goodbye to angular guitars, hello to synth



## ULTIMATE CROSSOVER

# The whole world in their music

## IN CONCERT

**What:** Sultans of String

**When:** Tonight, 7:30 p.m. (doors at 7)

**Where:** St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church (corner of Douglas and Broughton)

**Tickets:** \$20 (\$15 for seniors and students) in advance at Long & McQuade, Larsen Music, Ivy's Book Shop, and Lyle's Place

**Info:** 250-472-0999

**MIKE DEVLIN**

Times Colonist

From gypsy jazz and rumba flamenco to blues and classical, Toronto's Sultans of String leave no musical genre untouched.

"If there's a style of music out there we play it," said the group's de facto leader, violinist Chris McKhool.

There's no simple way to describe such a sound, which is why the back cover of the band's latest CD, *Luna*, comes bearing the tip, "File under:

Atomic world-jazz flamenco."

That's the band in a complicated nutshell. And yet, it barely begins to describe Sultans of String, a trio that combines the talents of McKhool, guitarist Kevin Laliberté and bassist Drew Birston with an entire world of influences.

Sultans of String expands its membership on the road, which further confuses those keeping track of the band's musical direction. Members of the group (and its extended family) have spent time in the studio and on tour with Jesse Cook, Pavlo, Robert Michaels, Chantal Kreviazuk, Melanie Doane, Loreena McKennit and Oliver Schroer.

"We all come from different backgrounds and bring different things to the band," McKhool said from the road, which will consume the band until the end of February. "There's a lot of cross-pollination between all the different styles, bringing different elements to it. We can

draw from a great pool of experience."

That has parlayed into a landslide of critical attention for the group, including a nomination at the Canadian Folk Music Awards in 2007. Despite their small measure of success, countrywide tours come only when the schedules of its members coalesce — which isn't often.

McKhool toured this summer as part of Jesse Cook's band, including dates at some major folk festivals. When he's not on the road with either Cook or the Sultans of String, the remainder of his musical schedule encompasses solo gigs and his budding career as a children's entertainer, which follows an eco-friendly bent.

McKhool, an avid cyclist and environmentalist, attempted to set a Guinness World Record last year by shepherding the world's largest bicycle bell ensemble.

The pace of his endeavours

dictates that McKhool must be reachable any time, anywhere. Hence, the creation of 1-800-MCKHOOOL, a one-stop shop to meet the demand; it doubles as the phone at his Toronto home. "If we were playing in stadiums I might not be advertising the 1-800-MCKHOOOL," he said.

"But the level we're at, it's nice to be approachable. Like in any business, you can only have so many middle people in the way."

McKhool's call volume has decreased recently as a result of e-mail's dominance. He now has an iPhone with which he fields business calls for Sultans of String. "If my iPhone stopped working, my world would collapse," he said with a guilty laugh.

Sultans of String is busy all the time, as McKhool fills the gaps in its concert schedule with dates at elementary schools. That was one of his many ideas, but it has worked wonders. The rest of the band



SULTANS OF STRING

Drew Birston, left, Chris McKhool and Kevin Laliberté make up the nucleus of the Sultans of String.

has come to appreciate the magic of kid-friendly events, he said. "We can pass the torch on to the younger aspiring musicians. It's nice for them to hear a variety of styles. It's good to get them interested in music."

Of equal interest on the group's current tour of Canada is a string of dates in Saskatchewan. Two of the province's biggest cities — Regina and Saskatoon — aren't on the itinerary. Other cities in the province, such as Prince Albert and Moose Jaw, whose combined population is less than 70,000, are nowhere to be found, either.

Instead, the group will be stopping at blink-and-you'll-

miss-it locales such as L. Ronge, Kindersley and Biggar. "We're playing everything with a stop light," McKhool joked.

McKhool credits the community tour to a small group of Saskatchewan fans committed to bringing live music into their homes.

"There are a bunch of people, mostly women, who work really hard going to shows meeting with each other, choosing what acts they are going to hire and fundraising and bake sales, everything that they need to do to bring music to their communities. It's amazing how hard these people work."

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