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## Free Planet Radio: Good vibrations

**By Edward Ortiz - Bee Arts Writer**

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In the mind of percussionist River Guerguerian, the vibrations that travel from musician to audience are not that different from those that vibrate inside the human brain.

And that intersection of music and mind is never lost on Guerguerian, who plays percussion with the trio Free Planet Radio.

It is one of the musical foundations of this Asheville, N.C.-based group that performs Wednesday at the Redwood Room at Sacramento State University as a part of its Festival of New American Music.

Vibrations of all kinds are elemental to Guerguerian, who uses them as much for healing as in music.

"The planet has a frequency of 7.87 Hertz, and brain waves vibrate between four and eight Hertz," said Guerguerian.

Guerguerian likes to point out that the same vibration is emitted in the Hindu vocalization of "om," the sacred syllable sound that represents the source of all manifest existence.

"If you check out ancient shamanic music, it is always in that same frequency range -- between four and eight (Hertz), and that is what gets you into a trance state."

Somewhere between those two frequencies is a tonal range that allows a musician to harness the minds of listeners.

"Physicists will tell you that almost everything is in vibration," said Eliot Wadopian, who plays acoustic bass in the ensemble.

"We do music that incorporates a drone -- a repeated type of pattern that really pulls people in," said Wadopian.

Drones can be either constantly vibrating tones or instruments that are used to evoke them, such as bagpipes or the Indian tambura. Thought to have originated in ancient Southeast Asia, the drone is used in many cultures and even in classical music as a device to evoke rustic themes.

For Free Planet Radio, the use of drones is used like a sweeping device that clears the audience's minds and sets the stage for what is to come.

"It helps to launch the musical and melodic ideas and sets the mind toward a place of reception," said Wadopian.

But that's not to say that the music Planet Free Radio plays is dronelike, repetitive or meditative. Rather, the music that this 4-year-old trio plays is best described as a pastiche of world, jazz and classical music.

Wadopian described the group's music as having an intense improvisational nature, and one that is played on both modern and traditional instruments.

All three musicians in the group, which also includes Chris Rosser, who plays the Indian dothar (the folk version of the sarod) and Turkish oud, are classically trained.

"We play a combination of world music that has nuances of Western classical music," said Guerguerian.

The training in classical is a counterpoint to the singular qualities of the drone.

"The thing that I like about Western classical music is the vocabulary, the way a whole orchestra with 80 musicians can go from pianissimo to triple forte in a few seconds."

With this ensemble, says Guerguerian, the nuances are there but the alienating qualities of classical music are not.

"We try to remove the barriers between audience and stage, because there is this invisible veil that I've noticed, especially with classical music," he said.

Guerguerian is a self-described "sound scientist" who talks with passion about vibration and tone, and the way they affect the human body.

Guerguerian was born in Montreal to Armenian and Syrian parents and is fluent with the music of the Middle East and India. A graduate of the Manhattan School of Music, Guerguerian has played with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Ziggy Marley and with Oscar-winning composer Tan Dun.

After graduation, Guerguerian played on the New York City music circuit, then dropped out and moved to the Himalayas and later Hawaii for a five-year sojourn, during which, he says, he lived "off the grid."

"I sold everything I owned," said Guerguerian. "All I had with me was a backpack and a hand drum."

The sojourn proved a formative experience.

Guerguerian focused much of his time learning how drumming affects young and old people. Along the way he learned about gong therapy -- a centuries-old Eastern practice used for healing that employs singing bowls and gongs of different sizes and vibrations, which are placed near the skin.

Some of the tones emitted from the bowls and gongs, like those emitted during chanting and meditation, induce the wave states in the brain. Those wave states are known to induce slow respiration and deep relaxation.

He believes the group's unique tone is its most powerful and recognizable asset.

"When you listen to five seconds of Miles Davis or John Coltrane, you know exactly that it's them because of their tone," said Guerguerian. "Their personality comes through."

"And that is what we try to achieve in the form of a distinctive tone for people to have something to latch on to."

## **FREE PLANET RADIO**

**WHAT:** Festival of New American Music

**WHEN:** Noon Wednesday

**WHERE:** Redwood Room, University Union, CSUS

**TICKETS:** Free

**INFORMATION:** (916) 278-5155 or [www.csus.edu/music](http://www.csus.edu/music)

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