

Experience world fusion with Free Planet Radio

Asheville Citizen-Times, by Carol Mallett-Rifkin

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For music that is beautiful, complex, diverse and played by masters of their instruments, look no further than the trio of Chris Rosser, River Guerguerian and Eliot Wadopian. Collectively they're a world fusion trio called Free Planet Radio and the sum of the whole is pretty powerful, especially considering the strength of the parts.

All three are educated and experienced masters of their groove, skilled craftsmen who come together with some pretty powerful sounds that cross from East to West with jazzy and sometimes dizzying forays into odd times, syncopations and electronic sounds.

This weekend's CD release party at the Grey Eagle kicking off their debut album "New Bedouin Dance" is a chance to hear the three live, on home turf.

"I think it's sort of a new genre, different music," said Rosser. "Not too many groups are blending jazz with world and classical music," he said. "There are a lot of world fusion bands but this has a really technically skilled sound, it's not a jam band," said Rosser.

Best known as a successful singer songwriter and record producer in the region, Rosser has produced more than 30 records in his studio for successful performers like David LaMotte, Josh Lamkin, Beth Wood, Billy Jonas and Laura Blackley, and is nationally known for his own writing and recording.

The trio formed originally as a more predictable one, with percussionist Guerguerian and bass player Wadopian backing up singer and guitar player Rosser on solo gigs. "River and Eliot both are like a songwriter and composer's dream," said Rosser. "They can play anything and read music really well." All three studied jazz and classical music and it was a natural progression to become friends and move to an experimental place musically. "It started out being about me but now we share it all equally in the trio," said Rosser.

"River really has the ability to step into the mood of the song with hand drums, or a drum kit, shakers, all the percussion," he said. "Eliot sticks to mostly upright bass but there a few electric bass pieces," said Rosser, who adds an astonishing array of exotic instruments to the record including Indian dotar, Turkish instruments, guitars, pianos, a melodica and harmonium.

Guerguerian was born in Montreal to Armenian/ Egyptian/Syrian parents and is well grounded in the music of the Middle East and India. Growing up in New York City and graduating from the Manhattan School of Music Conservatory, he's played with everyone from unknown masters to the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Ziggy Marley and the Gypsy Kings. A five year stint in the Himalayas communing with nature prepared

him for the move to Asheville in '99, just in time to become a really important influence in the growing percussive drum movement here.

Grammy winner Wadopian is on the musical staff at Western Carolina University. He studied at the prestigious Berklee College of Music and has played with everyone from Paul Winter to Judy Collins. A member of the Asheville Symphony, his technical skill is eerily remarkable on the new record.

Rosser is rooted in the classics too. From the small town of Casar, N.C., he studied jazz piano and studio recording at the University of Miami School of Music.

All three men have a brilliance and passion, the combination is otherworldly and attention getting. Some of the tracks are more Middle Eastern, like the first cut "Garden of the Beloved", while others sound jazzier like "Radio Asheville". "It has the improvisational elements of jazz, the nuances and vocabulary of classical and the raw groove elements of world music," said Guerguerian. It's a little like being transported into a movie scene with a soundtrack swirling around you. And that's part of what they are hoping for. "It would be great on a movie soundtrack," said Guerguerian, who's worked on films before.

It's a new fresh sound for Asheville and the experimental energy is fun too, watching three locally known masters create together. "At the show we'll do most of the pieces off the record but we'll mix in a bunch of my songs with them too," said Rosser.

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