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## Interview: Matt Sekel of Prana-Bindu talks Free Improv

The music genre "[Free Improv](#)" is exactly what the title suggests: musicians pick up their instruments and start playing whatever their creative inner voice tells them to play, for however long they deem necessary. Song key and notes played are not decided in advance; there is no formula or structure to follow. It's musical freedom in the truest sense. However, it's not exactly as simple as grabbing a guitar and thoughtlessly shredding away.



*Lorraine Schwartz*

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At first glance, Free Improv might just sound like aural chaos to the average listener. But there is actually a method to the madness. Though no plan is involved going into a session, there is a common goal: to take the listener and the musicians themselves on a journey. Think of it as taking a road trip, but throwing the map out the window and driving where the wind takes you, leaving you to appreciate the experience without any pre-conceived ideas. Ultimately what a Free Improv musician is doing is exploring soundscapes instead of landscapes.

Prana-Bindu is a group of local Connecticut musicians (Matt Sekel, Todd Knapp and Gene Moore) who play this style of music. I spoke to guitarist Sekel about the genre, the thought process behind improvising, and what it was like to open for legendary musician (and Rolling Stone Magazine's [99th Greatest](#) Rock and Roll Guitar Player), [Thurston Moore](#). (photos from that show can be found [here](#)).

**How did you find your way to this genre? When was the first time you heard this type of music?**

I think the genre actually found me. Growing up I never sat and tried to figure out how to play a song. I would listen to music and try to play something different over it. Make sounds that I thought fit the framework and theme of what I was hearing in a song. As a teenager I always wanted to just improvise when playing with friends and make up stuff on the spot and never play it again. I

found it more exciting and reckless than playing a cover song. I never realized that there was a whole genre of music doing that because I was too busy listening to Led Zeppelin and Van Halen. Then when I was 17 or 18 I started listening to 91.7 WXCI in Danbury to their metal show. There was a jazz show just before it that I would catch the end of that would play really out there stuff that I immediately liked. That is probably the first time I realized that there was something called [Free Jazz](#)/Improvisation. I am a bit of a slow learner.

### **Are there any musicians that have served as an influence on your playing this particular style of music?**

The guitar sounds of Jimi Hendrix, Eddie Van Halen and Jimmy Page had a big influence. Now I would say guitar-wise people that influence me are the ones with the guts to improvise in the outer rims of sanity like Bill Nace, Marc Ribot, Kawabata Makoto, Gene Moore and his brother Thurston.

### **How did Prana-Bindu come together?**

Todd Knapp who plays percussion and bass clarinet in Prana-Bindu is also in [76% Uncertain](#), [Hat City Intuitive](#) and Diztrict Allstarz. I used to work with Ken Petersen of 76% Uncertain and he introduced me to Todd because he knew that Todd and I liked a wide gamut of music. Over the years i would see Todd at shows and talk about music and eventually asked him to jam with the other improv group I am in called [Mittimus](#). Todd played a few shows with us and did some recording. Mittimus also did a few shows with Hat City Intuitive that Todd and Gene Moore are a part of. That is where I first met Gene. Then a few yeas later a few jams happened with

Gene, Todd and I. We all liked what was happening and that is how Prana-Bindu came to be.

**When you're playing, are the sounds you play a reaction to what you're hearing your bandmates play or do you just focus on your own sounds (without any regard to what they're doing)?**

I am always listening to what my band mates are doing and what may be going on in the audience. I am reacting to all of it. I am either trying to play something that I think will compliment what they are doing or trying to hint at something that may take us into a different atmosphere than we are currently in.

**What do you consider a successful session? Is there any way to mess up improv?**

I think it is successful when it all sounds like we are working together towards the same theme. For example even when it's chaotic it is obviously intentional and powerful is what we should be striving for. The way to mess up improv in my opinion is to not listen to one another and not execute what you think is appropriate to the music.

**You just played a sold out show at Hartford's Wadsworth Atheneum this past Saturday with [Thurston Moore](#). What did that mean to you as a musician/music fan?**

Honestly I am still processing the fact that I had the opportunity to play for a sold out audience in a nice theater opening for a fantastic musician. It is one of the most positive music experiences I have ever had. Thurston and his band are not only amazing musicians

but are some of the nicest people. This was the second time we opened for them and his fans are very receptive to our type of music which is such a great feeling.

**Anything you'd like to promote before we go?**

Prana-Bindu will have a cassette coming out on Thurston's label Ecstatic Peace! It's called "Betraye!". For up to date release info just check into [pranabindu.com](http://pranabindu.com).