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Memorabilia. Collecting Sounds with... is a new series from Ràdio Web MACBA that seeks to break through to unearth and reveal private collections of music and sound *memorabilia*. The documentary series is being presented this spring at the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) in a prospective conference/listening format, where four collectors have been invited to share the concerns and particular characteristics that have driven them to build their personal collections. This is a historiography of sound collecting that reveals the unseen and passionate work of the amateur collector while reconstructing multiple parallel histories such as the evolution of recording formats, archival issues, the sound collecting market and the evolution of musical styles beyond the marketplace.

This is a conversation by email between Jonny Trunk, Roc Jiménez de Cisneros, which took place on April-May 2012.

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Jonny Trunk founded the label Trunk Records in 1995, and it soon gained a cult following as a result of its specialisation in unpublished jazz recordings and film and television soundtracks. Trunk Records was the first label to feature non-commercial library music, a genre that Trunk has written about extensively. Trunk hosts a radio programme at London radio station Resonance FM, and he regularly DJs around the world. He began collecting records around 1982, but rather than focusing on traditional record stores, he chose to comb second hand outlets and street markets. It didn't take long for him to realise that his obsession was not pop music or modern sounds, but film soundtracks and television music. His record collection now consists of around six thousand LPs and his library music collection focuses on the period from 1966 to 1978 and exhaustively explores british, french, italian and german productions. www.trunkrecords.com

MEMORABILIA. COLLECTING SOUNDS WITH...

Jonny Trunk

01. Conversation with Jonny Trunk on his record collection

When and why did you start collecting music?

As far as I can remember I began when I was about sixteen. Why? Because I was seeing a lot of records for sale in charity shops, jumble sales, and in second hand shops and it interested me. The music was cheap and one purchase led to another.

What was the context? What was the spark that drove you to start actively consuming music?

I think it's a male thing. All of a sudden I really could not help myself, I had to start accumulating things and the records were inexpensive, bountiful and exciting.

I'm also curious about the context more generally. What music were you supposed to be consuming?

As far as I can work out, I could trace what I was collecting to several things: I) playing easy listening LPs at my grannies house. She had a stereo system and a small number of records. I was allowed to play with them. II) Being very interested in the music I was hearing from the TV. III) Being taught by my parents to never buy new things. This led me to second hand stores, charity shops, jumble sales and the records I'd find there suited my taste, educated me further and led me into a most peculiar sonic world.

Your previous comment just triggered a conversation with some other friends who are also collectors. You're totally right: all the collectors I've contacted and followed for this series are men! I didn't realise until you mentioned it. Why do you think collecting records is a male thing? Women also collect and can become hoarders of course, but for some strange reason it doesn't seem to be our field. The music industry has traditionally been masculine and there's probably some attempt to build an identity within the group. William Bennet talked about the possible perceived benefits of the social status afforded by 'collections.' What's your take on this?

We are all hard wired when we are born. Men just do the 'hunter gatherer' thing, collecting is just that, really. In some ways it's also like building.

What led you to become a record collector and to what extent is your collection defined or limited to one particular area of exploration?

At first my limitation was based on budget. I only bought second hand records that were very cheap – a few pennies. There were lots of records that were seen as being trash or worthless rubbish that were actually fascinating and good, and this is what I was buying. I have no conscious idea of what led me to become a record collector (apart from one leading to another). I think once I started I could not stop. But early on it was film music, TV music, jazz and odd things I wanted. I was never interested in pop music unless it was crazy.

One of your areas of interest is indeed library music and soundtracks. What would be your definition of library music and what drew your attention to that particular field? Does your collection have any particular parameters (chronological, conceptual, country of origin, etc.)?

Library music is music made for economic and instant use in TV and film. It is



[Jonny Trunk's record collection, 2012]

also someone's musical vision of something that may not have happened yet, which in some cases is very interesting. My interest in that area came through my obsessions with film and TV music. Once I got an eye and an ear for soundtracks, I started to realize there was other music, on (for example) educational programming, soft pornography or bizarre continental animations that had great music not credited to anyone. This was the music I became more fascinated with. Only in the early nineties did I find out that it was called 'library music'. My collecting of library music tends to fall between the years of 1966 and 1978, most of it from the UK, France, Italy or Germany.

What attracts you to that specific time frame? What makes the music produced in those years and countries particularly appealing to you?

It's the sound that works best for my ears and my own taste. Every now and then I step out and, in fact, I'm finding the occasional eighties production that is simple and really does work. The key phrase here is 'simple' and by the late seventies onwards a lot of music production becomes complex and messy with a reliance on terrible modern instruments and studio trickery that does not sound good. This is probably the problem my ears have with much of the music from the late seventies onwards.

The De Wolfe Music company was in a sense the origin of the library music genre: the visionary intuition of Meyer De Wolfe back in 1907, who saw a market for ready-made music and sound in the media and a need for pre-cleared music so that the audiovisual industry could keep up its fast paced production line. It seems like a major change of paradigm in the way music was conceived/produced.

I believe it was simply a very clever business idea. Make well-played, suitable music for instant, inexpensive use by film-makers. A very clever idea indeed.

You've probably read about what this change of paradigm in the media was like, back then. Any ideas on how the emergent industry saw it at the time? Do you think any un-cleared appropriation of existing works took place?

I really have no idea, I think until library music came about it was either a composer you used or a standard piece of sheet music composed in the style you were looking for.

How did this original idea change or evolve in the lead up to the periods you focus on (format wise)? Other music companies started to copy the De Wolfe Music model.

It all started with music on strips of film, actual soundtracks. Then this moved into shellac discs, later on to 10" 78 rpm discs – normally with just one or two tracks per side. These had just standard card sleeves, no illustrations, and all publishing info was on the label. Until about the mid sixties, 78 rpm were still being pressed as many of the TV companies still used 78 rpm gramophones. It was in the mid to late sixties when finally the library companies decided it might be a good idea to start pressing onto 33 rpm vinyl. Most early vinyl is just on 10" 33 rpm pressings, until the late sixties and early seventies, when they were producing enough music per session or idea to issue a whole 12" 33 rpm album. Many of the LPs I collect are 10" or 12".

Was it good quality vinyl? Being utilitarian music with almost no labels in some cases, I wonder how important the quality of reproduction was. My friend Raül G. Pratginestós told me that some of the Italian productions did make an effort with the quality of the sleeves and the vinyl.

If you play library music out loud in a club it sounds incredible. It is some of the finest quality recorded and pressed music you could ever wish to find. It had to be broadcast quality.

The importance of this change of paradigm is often overlooked though, and library music is mostly seen as decorative music or second-class music.

Some of it is a little vanilla. But there is enough brilliantly made, played and composed music to make it a worthy and important musical genre.



[Jonny Trunk's record collection, 2012]

One of the most interesting aspects of sound libraries, and one of their hidden and loveliest values has to do with the challenge that musicians and composers faced when they were asked to imagine situations that were not real or not documented. In fact, one of your own obsessions is sub aquatic music. What's so fascinating about it?

This is really why I like the music – the idea that a composer has to make music for something that has not happened yet. As for the sub aquatic thing, this is partly to do with that, and partly with the fact that I grew up and Jacques Cousteau was on the TV a lot.

What are the most surprising or surreal sound libraries you've discovered?

More than likely the Italian avant-garde bits, along with a few of the English electronic recordings.

Aside from this capacity to recreate fictive sounds (by exploring surreal instances of the space-time axis: from space to earth, from the past to the future, from the real to the imaginary), I am also fascinated by the way the taxonomy and classification of concepts was approached.

If I understand your question correctly you are asking about the way library albums were classified, or conceptualized. Much of the idea behind the albums came from the people who ran the libraries. They would request music for outer space if space music seemed to be an emerging field. Or they would request more music for science if they had a client who was starting a series in this field. But within that, it may well have been down to the musician in many cases, especially those with an avant-garde or electronic bent. Titles and idea within these albums would fall to either the libraries or the musicians.

Electronic musicians like Bernard Parmegiani, Horacio Vaggione, Delia Derbyshire (and the BBC Radiophonic Workshop) found a blank canvas for experimentation in this field... Some narratives and stories seemed to invite weird sounds that we would otherwise not imagine on TV.

Actually I think a lot of the music made by these people was sometimes meant for other jobs but not used, and then sold on to libraries as experimental library music. That's what I have come across. And it seems like a sensible way to use 'unwanted' pieces.

What was it made for?

Well these people were artists, often experimental artist, so the music may have been made for commissions, exhibitions, concerts, ideas, all sorts of things, and maybe only used or played once.

And then they were reused for libraries? That's very interesting. Was that a common practice then? A way of reusing existing material?

For some it was. The best example I can think of is Delia Derbyshire. A lot of her Radiophonic work for the BBC was sold on to the library companies. She would not have been paid much to work at the BBC so any extra income would have been welcome.

Some soundtracks are also considered library music. But I wonder if all soundtracks are put in the same basket. Where should we draw the line? Is György Ligeti a library music composer as well?

Some soundtracks are actually library music, sometimes it's the other way round. But they are different. And no, Ligeti had his music used in TV and film, but there is no Ligeti library music.

How about Oskar Sala? And what's the difference? Is there a consensus on what is and what isn't library music?

Sala from what I believe made the electronic noises for Hitchcock's *The Birds*.



[Jonny Trunk's record collection, 2012]

But this was a job he was given, and that makes him a soundtrack composer. He was a very creative and interesting musician, but to my knowledge none of his music was ever sold to a music library. Well I have not seen any yet...

So library music was always produced (and distributed) before the actual film/radio/tv show existed? Are there any other differences from soundtrack music?

Yes, they are different. And there are many obvious and many subtle differences. A good example is the soundtrack by Miles Davis to *Life to the Scaffold*. He composed it, or rather improvised it while watching the movie unfold in front of him and his band, so they played what fitted. This was his soundtrack, made just to fit that film. Library music is often made with no actual vision of picture for it to go along with. What I do find interesting is that some library music does become film music, and some film music does become library music. And then some film music crosses over into commercial music and so on... I actually have more soundtracks than I have library music. To me they go hand in hand. And many of the composers cross over and do both.

I can easily picture sound library records, but producing tracks that would then be used for films sounds quite challenging. It is like a blind date somehow. How did this work? Were they commercialized together with sound library records, or where they different series?

All the music was bundled together. It worked a bit like a lottery, you dream up and compose music that you think is suitable for something and it may well get used for that purpose. Otherwise it may get used for something else, or nothing at all. This is another aspect of library music I enjoy. Big band novelty music ending up as Zombie march music. Crazy.

Can you share a popular example of a library track that was not designed specifically for a film?

No, library music is specifically made for use in film, TV, broadcasting in general, so everything when you consider that, has been made with the possibility of it being used in a film.

I think there were probably different styles and production trends according to the origin of the material. Cinema, and specially television and radio, were not so globalised in the time frame you specialise in (between 1966 and 1978). Can you reflect on this?

I can try. All I can really say is that the period we have specified is one of vast technological, political, industrial and just about every other change you care to mention. Look at films in 1966 and compare them with those of the late seventies. Completely different, as was the music, the fashions, the cars, the habits, the buildings... everything. I think because I was growing up then I like looking back and seeing what everyone grown up was getting up to. Strangely enough, I'm not the only person who believes that period is a very special one.

How would you explain this aesthetic change? Quite often these changes are linked to technological developments and access to certain instruments, was that the case? If not, what's your theory?

A mixture of all sorts of things, changes in taste... humans need to move forward (even though that may well be in a reverse direction) and as I stated before, changes in musical technology, new synths, new desks, new musical ideas and of course new musical fashions.

Given that it is functional music by definition, commissioned with a specific goal, library music is often closely connected to everything that happens in and around that context. It has close ties to trends, to the genre it represents (imitating previous works), etc. And yet, it's easy to find cult soundtracks and composers. Precisely because of what we were discussing earlier, it is also possible to identify different ways of producing and distributing material by country. For instance, Italian productions used heavy vinyl records with very elaborate sleeves for a while, which were quite different from the rather generic library music records being made in other countries around the same time. What was going on in the Italian context?



[Jonny Trunk's record collection, 2012]

Do you know of other cases that also stood out for their peculiarities?

Firstly, I must say that often what you think is going to be predictable and connected to the genre it represents is very often completely different and surprising. Also, when it comes to production of both the music and the actual LPs, this is also very unpredictable. Much of the music was made in tiny studios, others were recorded in large impressive and well equipped ones. Some vinyl pressed is poor, some is superb. Some have thick, heavy sleeves, others have paper folded in two. The Italians are quite unpredictable here, in that nothing is or can be expected, whether musically or physically with the finished product.

It is quite curious that being a business-driven industry there was no standard.

In the UK there was a standard. In the USA there seems to have been a standard. Same in France. But in Italy, there was never a standard. That's because they are all brilliant and all crazy at the same time.

Can you explain how this music was originally distributed and the circuits in which collectors find library music?

Originally library music was pressed onto vinyl and given by the library companies to TV companies, film companies, universities, radio production houses, broadcasters, schools. These companies and organizations would use and store these LPs. When CDs began to appear, many of the companies got rid of the old LPs. They would be thrown away, trashed, put in rubbish skips, given to charities or hospital radio stations. Over the years I have found them in strange places; in charity shops, car boot sales, sometimes record shops, at TV companies that are closing down, in schools. In the nineties, there were some library companies that would sell their unwanted library records for very little money. They were worthless at the time. More recently the internet has been very useful in finding this kind of music.

Nevertheless, the peculiarities of this particular field seem to make it particularly obscure and difficult to follow. How has the internet helped with that?

The internet has allowed these obscure records to be found much easier, thanks to selling websites, blogs, all sorts. The information that has been shared over the last ten years can make anyone a collector and expert within a few days.

What are your thoughts on collecting something that was probably seen as a utility rather than an art form when it was conceived?

I think it is interesting that this music was made for non-commercial usage, not for sale as records, and it has now, in some cases, become very valuable. I have always loved things that are difficult to find, and trying to find music that is not allowed or not for sale is the perfect challenge for me. The fact that I love it so much and really wanted it is even better and strangely serendipitous. What I also like is the fact that many of the composers who were making this music purely for utilitarian reasons are now seen as pioneers, mavericks and crazy composers.

Why do you think that it was only in retrospect, with the passing of time, that their work came to be seen as valuable and collectible? Do you have any theory or have you done any research on how they saw themselves back then? I mean, how did they deal with the utilitarianism of their music? How much of a challenge was that?

Many of the composers I have spoken to were just doing their job – making music for the libraries to a specific brief. None of them had any idea that in 30 or 40 years time it would be explored and seen again as something a little more interesting.

Did they recognize an opportunity for creativity or innovation? Where and how did this happen?

Some of the composers indeed saw it as a place for experimentation; others were just seeing it as a quick job that would possibly earn some money if it was done well.



[Jonny Trunk's record collection, 2012]

I'm interested in both extremes. Can you share some examples of each?

Example 1: John Cameron. Amazing composer, musician and arranger. He used to phone up the libraries and ask 'what do you need, I can make it for you'. They would then say we need some new action cues, or some more pastoral music. He'd then write it and make it, properly to order.

Example 2: Roger Roger would buy a new moog, or get a new ARP. He find a drummer, make some rhythms, play the moog/ARP over the top without really knowing how to use it, and see what would happen. He'd record 16 tracks in a few hours, then send them over to a library and hope they'd run with it, based on the fact it was a 'new sound'.

Who are your favorite composers and what makes their music precious to you?

I am a fan of Basil Krichin, his library music doesn't sound like library music. I like Roger Roger as he is so prolific – he made thousands of recordings of every style you can imagine and some you could not possibly imagine. I like the experimental Italian composers such as Alessandrini or Umiliani, who again made hundreds of recordings, sometimes taking only a few minutes to think of a tune, play it and record it. I think John Cameron is amazing as he can turn his hand to anything, and he also is a bit of a modernist. I like the experimental composers like Fred Judd, who made early electronic sounds on old military equipment and I love composers like Vladimir Cosma who make wonderful melodic childish music. I could go on and on. I love all the composers.

When did you realize you were becoming a collector? Did that realization change the way you bought and collected records in any way?

Probably when I had more records than anyone I knew. But my way of collecting has never changed.

Collecting is about overcoming a series of difficulties: how do you deal with the lack of information, price speculation and scarcity of copies? Is that what makes collecting music particularly interesting from your point of view?

Over the years I have had to learn the hard way with library music, and I am still learning. Luckily in London I met similar minded music collectors and we all swapped information and LPs over the years, and all learned together. As for price speculation I have never wanted to pay much money for any records, so I have never paid too much for anything. I am very careful and I trust the fact that a very rare expensive record will eventually turn up for not much money at all. And I'd always rather buy a cheap record that no one looks at than an expensive one everyone wants, because eventually people will want the cheap one when it is no longer cheap. This for me makes collecting even more interesting.

Your collection in numbers: approximately how many records do you own? And I can't avoid asking, what is your most valuable record? Is it possible to choose a personal favorite? What's the most extravagant record you have?

There are maybe 3000–4000 LPs here. The most valuable record is maybe £1500–£2000. I do not have a favorite as this changes all the time. As I have mentioned I am very careful with buying records. I have only paid over £100 three times. If you stay ahead of the musical trends the music is always cheaper. LPs I have bought over the years for maybe £40–£50 are now worth £400–£500.

An inevitable question, given your approach: which records did you pay over £100 for, and what made them so irresistible?

The only two library LP I have paid over £100 for were *Open Air Parade*, which I waited about 12 years to find and when it came up for sale I really did not want to miss it. I think it was about £120. It is now worth about £750. The other was the classic Vincent Geminai LP which is just sublime. He made his own instruments.

Do you have database of all the records you own?



[Jonny Trunk's record collection, 2012]

I have no database. They are all filed by library. Occasionally in numerical order.

Some collectors claim they know by heart all the records they own. I imagine acquiring complete library collections doesn't make it easy.

I do not know everything by heart but I do go a bit crazy if I cannot find something I am looking for that I know I have. I do have a strange instinct about the collection, where certain music or sounds may be.

Can you share an unexpected revelation? Something you bought without thinking too much? And the opposite, an example where your expectations were too high for what you found when you bought the record.

When I got about 1,000 LPs from the Yorkshire TV company library I had to put some into storage, and some of the terrible Italian LPs were to be given to charity shops. This was not a problem as the LPs had been given to me anyway. I was about to give some to the charity shop when the day before I stumbled across a record selling for £1,000. A copy if it was in the pile to be given to the charity shop the next day. I am afraid I did not give it to charity and sold it.

There are also quite a lot of LPs that are very much sought after, and rare and very expensive, then eventually you get to get them and they are not very good at all. That happens quite a lot. In fact the LP I just mentioned was truly terrible. And someone bought it for £999 from me. Crazy.

And an impossible dream?

To find more very rare records for £1 each. Or maybe buy a whole Italian library company for £1,000.

A record you will never sell.

Open Air Parade.

What's so special about it?

There are very few copies in the world, it took me about ten years of constant looking to find one, it is by Alessandrini (Morricone's whistler), I love the label it is on, I love the music on it too.

Have you ever considered selling your collection?

No, I have not. They are now my business and without them I wouldn't be able to work how I now work.

Most of the sound collectors I've talked to express what we've come to describe as the 'thrill of the hunt', meaning that once they own what they were looking for, it kind of loses its value for them. Do you listen to all the material you own?

There is always an element of that, but I use and play my records all the time, even things that I have not listened to for maybe ten years all of a sudden they have something I need, or must hear. I am not one of those collectors who have to tick all the boxes and buy every single LP in a genre.

Are you very meticulous with your sound collection? Do you collect second copies?

I only buy second copies if they are cheap. And then I sell them on to buy LPs I do not have. I have my LPs in genre order and alphabetical order if they are soundtracks, and by library if they are library records. But they are all over the house and I am not meticulous.

Do you think the digital revolution, to give it a name, is killing sound collecting? How do you imagine the future of sound collecting?

The digital revolution has been with us in full swing for maybe a decade now. It has changed collecting in that there is more information about everything



[Jonny Trunk]

everywhere. You can hear rare music that you may not be able to find or buy which is great. But there is still a very lovely scene for collecting the real LPs. And prices remain strong for the 'real thing'.

What do you think about the recent news related to piracy prosecution and the takedown of sites like megaupload?

It's just part of the digital age we live in. Many of the illegal sites are just giving away music, it seems to be their attitude that all music should be free and shared. And in some ways you can understand that.

And going back to your field of work, how has the library/production music industry adapted to the present? De Wolfe Music is still offering their services and the demand and need for 'decorative music' in the media is still strong. Are Creative Commons sound libraries used in the more mainstream media?

The industry has exploded, become more competitive, aggressive, cheaper and more crazy. Back in the sixties there were a few, maybe ten libraries. Today in London there are about 400 all hard at work, for less business. Music is almost given away, it's more instant, more throwaway, terrifyingly poor in some respects. There are no vinyl records, not even CDs these days, the services and the search facilities for music are all online, and the prices and market change accordingly, and very fast.

Digital music is seeing a new breed of sound collectors, the completists, as William Bennett called them in his lecture... What do you think about this new paradigm?

I think there have always been completists. The digital scene may make it a bit easier to find out what is needed to be a completist, and digital files are in many cases easier to find and collect. But I have no interest at all. I must always have a tangible object.

eBay and Discogs are also part of the digital revolution and have affected the sound collecting market. How have these tools changed sound collecting?

They have created easier ways to collect (there are some records I never thought I'd ever find that I have thanks to ebay), easier ways to sell and in many cases a very false market. How can a record on Monday sell for £300 and by the end of the week another copy will sell for £65? Madness.

What's your relationship with other collectors exploring similar aesthetics or material?

There is a healthy sense of rivalry, some useful sharing of information. I'm sure many of us are quite guarded with information though, as it is very hard to come across and of course once word is out about a specific composer or undiscovered LP or track, the prices and market change accordingly, and very fast.

William also said that 'The romance of sound collecting might be dead – not because of the music, but due to the loss of the personal human component of the process.' What do you think about that?

Well it's dead if you stay at home and just buy music online. For me it is very much alive, I still find collections, go to shops, sales, auctions, markets. And I will keep doing so. It is very much alive if you want it to be.

03. Acknowledgments

This email conversation between Jonny Trunk, Anna Ramos and Roc Jiménez de Cisneros took place on April-May 2012.

04. Copyright note

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