



## Research > MEMORABILIA. COLLECTING SOUNDS WITH... Brian Shimkovitz

MEMORABILIA. COLLECTING SOUNDS WITH... seeks to break through to unearth and reveal private collections of music and sound *memorabilia*. It 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, archiving issues, the collecting market and the evolution of musical styles beyond the marketplace.

Each episode in the series is accompanied by an additional programme featuring an exclusive music selection by each of the collectors.

### PDF Contents:

- 01. Summary
- 02. Playlist
  - Part I
- 03. Related links
- 04. Acknowledgments
- 05. Copyright note

Produced by Matías Rossi

Brian Shimkovitz is the man behind the infamous blog **Awesome Tapes from Africa**, an online and extremely peculiar project, which has also turned into a full-fledged record label where he reissues all sorts of African tape rarities, from folkloric pop and left-field dancefloor gems to hip-hop bangers, shedding light on obscure sounds from across the continent. [www.awesometapes.com](http://www.awesometapes.com)

Matías Rossi studied Journalism the National University of La Plata (UNLP), Argentina. In 2000 he settled in Barcelona, where he set up his current base of operations. Rossi was a regular collaborator with the label *Ooze.bâp* and co-director of the online magazine *Acetone* and the Fanzinoteca *Ambulant*. In 2005 he founded the instrumental group *Bradien*, which has released several works and collaborated with Bill Wells, John Giorno and Catalan poet Eduard Escoffet. [www.bradien.net](http://www.bradien.net)

# MEMORABILIA. COLLECTING SOUNDS WITH...

## Brian Shimkovitz. Part I

The tale of how a student of ethnomusicology from Brooklyn spent a year in West Africa buying tapes off street markets... and how he managed to turn that bizarre collection into one of the most revered record labels in recent years.

### 01. Summary

When Brian Shimkovitz went to Ghana on a Fulbright Scholarship for ethnomusicology in 2005, he was confronted with a rich, bizarre, puzzling and extremely varied array of music, mostly released on cassettes. 'I had never really considered going to Africa,' he says, 'but I had this interest in popular music in cities.' And the African music scene turned out to be just the ideal fieldwork project for Shimkovitz. For a whole year he was based in Accra, the capital city of Ghana, but occasionally traveled to other locations in West Africa such as Mali, Togo and Burkina Faso. In all of these places, street markets and stalls provided him with a seemingly endless supply of out-of-the-way material. By the time he went back to Brooklyn, having interviewed a substantial number of MCs, DJs and producers, he had amassed an impressive collection of tapes, but had no master plan for them. Starting a blog to channel his findings ('communicating it to people without dumbing it down completely', as he recalls) seemed like a reasonable enough idea. The name of the blog was pretty self-explanatory: *Awesome Tapes from Africa*. Steering away from the stereotypical afro-exoticist formulation that had been associated to the World Music market for decades, Brian made an effort to simply share his own excitement for the sounds, the artwork and the richness of his fragmented collection: 'a non-encyclopedic approach to this very, very broad and deep array of music that's out there – that I'm certain my 4,000 cassettes is only scratching the surface of 0.01% of music that's commercially available.' It was probably this straightforward approach, combined with the viral potential of the web that made the project grow beyond his wildest expectations. Some years later, what began as a fairly underground resource for close friends, some connoisseurs and digital crate-diggers, has turned into a full-fledged record label.

*Awesome Tapes From Africa* reissues all sorts of African tape rarities, from folkloric pop, to left-field dancefloor gems and hip-hop bangers, shedding light on obscure and wonderful sounds from across the continent. The label has received major acclaim from publications worldwide for its reissues by re-discovered legends including Ethiopian accordion and keyboard maestro Hailu Mergia, Somali funk and soul group *Dur-Dur Band* and Malian chanteuse *Nahawa Doumbia*, underscoring the broader mission of *Awesome Tapes from Africa*: contributing to building the international market for African music and helping a few of his favorite artists find new audiences through touring and reissues.

### 02. Playlist

#### Part I

- Oriango & Kipchamba, 'Bane Matanda', from the tape *Magdalena*
- Maurice Maiga, 'Amore', from the tape *Mugun Fata*
- Phish, 'Sanity', from the tape *Junta*
- Sun Ra, 'Paradise', from the record *Sound of Joy*
- Snr Eddie Donkor, 'Kwaku Anase', from the tape *Eye Banker*
- Motia, 'Dora', from the compilation *Sounds of Our Time*
- Okra, 'Agynamo Kyesi', from the compilation *Sounds of Our Time*
- Dr. Orlando Owoh & His Omimah Band, 'Osupa Roro', from the tape *Dr. Orlando Owoh & His Omimah Band*
- Reggie Rockstone, 'Keep Your Eyes On the Road', from the record *Me Na Me Kae*
- Kandja Kouyate, 'Guede', from the tape *Et l'Ensemble Instrumental du Mali*
- Kumasi Bantama Christ Revival Singers, 'Wo Pe Nye Ho', from the tape *Wo Pe*



[Brian Shimkovitz]

*Nye Ho*

Maurice Maiga, 'Karen Dawure', from the tape *Mugun Fata*

Scizo, 'Ke Shi Ka Le', from the compilation *Sounds of our time*

Hailu Mergia, 'Sewnetuwa', from the record *Hailu Mergia and his Classical Instrument*

Bola, 'Tigantabame', from the record *Volume 7*

Stephen Osita, 'People's Club of Nigeria Part 1', from the tape *People's Club of Nigeria*

Chief (Dr.) Sikiru Ayind Barrister, 'Fuji Explosion', from the tape *Fuji Explosion*

Snr Eddie Donkor, 'Asem Yi', from the tape *Eye Banker*

Mahmoud Guinia, 'Ed Zalba', from the tape *Maâlem*

Ikenga Super Stars of Africa, 'Olu Ugbo', from the tape *Sweet Mother*

Bainito Muyanda, 'Walia Inyanya', from the tape *Kifo Cha Wamalwa*

Black Nature and Heavy D, 'Azuhukanbe', from the tape *Wumbanma*

Thoughts On Air, 'Zy', from the tape *Glow On*

Chief (Dr.) Sikiru Ayind Barrister, 'Orin Sipo O', from the tape *Fuji Explosion*

### 03. Related links

Awesome Tapes from Africa

[www.awesometapes.com](http://www.awesometapes.com)

Podcast: MEMORABILIA. Collecting sounds with... Brian Shimkovitz. Part I

[rwm.macba.cat/en/research/memorabilia\\_brian\\_shimkovitz/capsula](http://rwm.macba.cat/en/research/memorabilia_brian_shimkovitz/capsula)

Brian Shimkovitz's mix for XL8R podcast series

[www.xlr8r.com/podcast/2009/07/awesome-tapes-africa](http://www.xlr8r.com/podcast/2009/07/awesome-tapes-africa)

Brian Shimkovitz's mix for RBMA podcast series

[www.rbmaradio.com/shows/awesome-tapes-from-africa-train-wreck-mix](http://www.rbmaradio.com/shows/awesome-tapes-from-africa-train-wreck-mix)

Brian Shimkovitz's tape for his Australian tour

[www.mixcloud.com/TheThousands/awesome-tapes-from-africa-mixtape/](http://www.mixcloud.com/TheThousands/awesome-tapes-from-africa-mixtape/)

Brian Shimkovitz as a special guest on 'Mudd Up', DJ/Rupture's radio show

[wfmu.org/playlists/shows/24929](http://wfmu.org/playlists/shows/24929)

Article by Brian Shimkovitz for *The Wire's* 'Collateral Damage' column:

[thewire.co.uk/in-writing/essays/p=10630](http://thewire.co.uk/in-writing/essays/p=10630)

Article: 'Q&A: Awesome Tapes From Africa's Brian Shimkovitz On Cassette DJing, His New Label, And His Overflowing Mailbox'

[blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2011/09/awesome\\_tapes\\_from\\_africa\\_brian\\_shimkovitz\\_interview.php](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2011/09/awesome_tapes_from_africa_brian_shimkovitz_interview.php)

Article: 'Cassette Culture: An Interview with Awesome Tapes from Africa's Brian Shimkovitz'

[www.icrates.org/cassette-culture-an-interview-with-awesome-tapes-from-africas-brian-shimkovitz/](http://www.icrates.org/cassette-culture-an-interview-with-awesome-tapes-from-africas-brian-shimkovitz/)

### 04. Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Brian Shimkovitz and Ingrid Guardiola. Produced by Matias Rossi. Recorded with Beyerdynamic MC 930, a Tascam DR-100 recorder and edited with Ableton Live.

### 05. Copyright note

2013. All rights reserved. © by the respective authors and publishers.

Ràdio Web MACBA is a non-profit research and transmission project. Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders; any errors or omissions will be corrected whenever possible upon notification in writing to the publisher.