



Research > MEMORABILIA. COLLECTING SOUNDS WITH... Eric Isaacson

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.

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Produced by Rosanna Arbon.

Eric Isaacson is the owner of Mississippi Records, a devoted record shop and label based in Portland, Oregon. The label has produced over 150 releases on LP including Indian classical vocalist Kesarbai Kerkar, Portland guitar virtuoso Marisa Anderson, spirit-channelling Bishop Perry Tillis and many more from an increasingly wide range of genres, time spans and origins. Isaacson also produces and releases compilations on cassette as part of the Mississippi tape series and designs striking collage-based artwork for all releases.

Rosanna Arbon is an independent audio producer based in London. She is currently working with Falling Tree Productions and collaborating with In The Dark, curating listening events around the city. Rosanna is also a visiting lecturer in radio at Bournemouth University.

MEMORABILIA. COLLECTING SOUNDS WITH...

Eric Isaacson

Eric Isaacson describes his personal listening and sound collecting habits from childhood to present day. It may seem obvious looking back but Isaacson had no idea that a childhood obsession with The Beatles, careful construction of his own mix tapes and an armful of Daniel Johnston cassettes would be the foundation for his work as founder of Mississippi Records label and shop and the keeper of a uniquely free flowing record collection that is detached from time.

01. Summary

Collecting music began as a private pursuit for Isaacson, from the age of five he was recording songs off the radio and making his own mix tapes. His biggest undertaking was reconstructing the Beatles back catalogue, track by track, album by album entirely off the radio which took him four years to complete. That kind of behaviour might lead you to believe the young Isaacson would grow to be one of the breed of sound collectors that William Bennett refers to as the completists, but Isaacson is far from it. Around 300 records make it into his personal collection at one time, it seems a small amount for someone who runs a record label but Isaacson's collection is constantly on the move – he gets hold of records as quickly as he gets rid of them because ultimately what matters most is the contemporary relationship he is having with each record in his collection. 'I'd go insane otherwise,' he says, 'my interests go in such different directions, I would have to have 50,000 records to represent what I'm into and that's impossible.' In lieu of a physical collection, Isaacson's notebooks which are filled with lists of songs that either have or might make their way on to a Mississippi release are a testament to the extensive amount of records that have been a part of his life over the past ten years.

Isaacson's unique design sensibility adorns the covers of Mississippi releases, early influences include Daniel Johnston and punk rock zines, whilst more recent influences include the cover art of Folkways Records and Indian Tantra art, but as with Isaacson's sound collection, his artistic influence is vast. Isaacson says his style was created by his limitations: 'I had to find a unique voice because I couldn't use tricks or skills, flashing lights or dazzling techniques'. Isaacson's cover art is bold, colourful and raw, the imagery is almost cryptic at times and as such Mississippi releases can't help but stand out on any shelf.

02. Playlist

- Georgia Sea Island Singers, 'Adam & Eve' (*Join The Band*, Mississippi/Change Records)
- Cecil Barfield, 'William Robertson Blues' (*South Georgia Blues*, Mississippi Records)
- Abner Jay, 'The Reason Young People Use Drugs' (*True Story of Abner Jay*, Mississippi Records)
- Daniel Johnston, 'Strange Boy' (*Retired Boxer*, Stress Records)
- Daniel Johnston, 'I'll Do Anything But Break Dance For Ya, Darling' (*Retired Boxer*, Stress Records)
- Dead Moon, 'Don't Burn the Fires' (*In The Graveyard*, Mississippi Records)
- Bishop Perry Tillis, 'Good News' (*In Times Like These...*, Mississippi Records)
- Marisa Anderson, 'Colfax' (*Mercury*, Mississippi/Change Records)
- Abner Jay, 'I Wanna Job' (*Folk Song Stylist*, Mississippi Records)
- Moondog, 'Rimshot' (*The Viking of Sixth Avenue*, Honest Jons)
- Kesarbai Kerkar, 'Lalat: Ghatan Lagi Rain' (*Kesarbai Kerkar*, Mississippi/Change Records)
- Gurdjieff, 'June 8, 1949' (*Improvisations*, Mississippi/Change Records)
- Michael Hurley, 'The Tea Song' (*Back Home with Drifting Woods*, Mississippi/Change Records)



[Eric Isaacson behind the counter of his record store, Mississippi Records, in Portland, Oregon]

Georgia Sea Island Singers, 'Join The Band' (*Join The Band*, Mississippi/Change Records)
The Counts, 'Enchanted Sea' (*House of Broken Hearts, Part one, Mississippi Tape Series, Vol. 1 - Early R&B, Doo Wop Rockabilly & Instrumentals*, Mississippi Records)
Sonny Day, 'Beyond The Shadow Of A Doubt' (*House of Broken Hearts, Part one, Mississippi Tape Series, Vol. 1 - Early R&B, Doo Wop Rockabilly & Instrumentals*, Mississippi Records)
Marisa Anderson, 'Sinks and Rises' (*Mercury*, Mississippi/Change Records)
Abbebe Tesemma 'Ashasha Beyew' (*Assiya Bellema: Golden Years Of Modern Ethiopian Music*, Mississippi/Change Records)
Kesarbai Kerkar, 'Lalita Gouri: Preetam Saiyan' (*Kesarbai Kerkar*, Mississippi/Change Records)
Georgia Sea Island Singers, 'Sometimes' (*Join The Band*, Mississippi/Change Records)

03. Related links

Mississippi Community Supported Records – subscription service from Mississippi Records

<https://sites.google.com/site/mississippicsr/>

Mississippi Records Illustrated Discography (001 to 050)

http://toto.lib.unca.edu/sounds/miss_records/

Interview with Eric Isaacson in Sound American

www.soundamerican.org/eric-isaacson-and-mississippi-records

Interview with Eric Isaacson in Analog Edition Zine

www.everybodytaste.com/2012/07/analog-edition-zine-interview-with-eric.html

Seven questions with Eric Isaacson

www.complex.com/city-guide/2011/03/7-questions-with-eric-isaacson-of-mississippi-records-portland

Alan Lomax YouTube channel

www.youtube.com/user/AlanLomaxArchive?feature=watch

Association for Cultural Equality (custodian of the Alan Lomax Archive)

www.culturalequity.org

MEMORABILIA. Collecting sound with... podcast series:

http://rwm.macba.cat/en/memorabilia_tag/

04. Acknowledgements

Produced by Rosanna Arbon.

05. Copyright note

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