

S I R R - E C O R D S



Sirr-ecords is a label from portugal, ran by paulo raposo, who replied to our questions on september 15th, 2002

- I'd like to know a little biographical information about you, such as how old you are, where you grew up, your schooling... Any sort of information that could help readers to understand how you got to be who you are today.

well, I was born in 1967. I live in lisbon where I grew up. and between 1985 and 1994, I studied philosophy and cinema. my interest for music started very early and in a very eclectic way. in a perfect day of 1981, I would listen to pierre henry and kraftwerk, to sun ra and arnold shoenberg, to cabaret voltaire and bela bartok. I was very enciclopedic those days. later, my trips to london or paris would include a vast research through obscure record shops (to the despair of my girlfriends). In new york, during my residence at phil Niblock's Experimental Intermedia, i bought 96 cds. it sounds a bit freaky...but I am not really a collector. It happens that I always liked a lot of different stuff. Besides buying records, I started to make music around the mid-eighties. In those years, me and carlos santos (who is stilll my musical partner and co-founder of the label) would go to the countryside with those cheap sony mics portable cassette recorder and enjoy insects, frogs, water, whatever, as subject of acoustic interest. probably, we were listening to too much concrete music...we started to buy instruments like samplers, sinths and tape recorders. my first samplers used floppy discs and it was very stressy to use them live because you had to choose a floppy 2 or 3 minutes before the actual sound would come out. we created a label to release our tapes in 1989 and got nice reviews for our work. so I guess that the idea of a "real" label was there all the time.



- **Which friendly piece of advice would you give to someone who wants to start his label ? What used to be tape-only labels are now CDR-only labels. Do you think it makes it easier for people to start their label and run less risks ?**

the advice I could give is to have good ideas, always do your best to promote the artists and their work.

the problem with cdr labels is that they can't find distributors willing to take the records and sell them. so in the end, it's a lot of effort for nothing. the market is very saturated, but of course, CDR-only labels can be very interesting and also necessary, if you want to make your own work visible.

and let's not forget there are very small distributors specialized in this sort of stuff.

- **To me the role of a label should be to discover new acts, help them get promotion, distribution, spread the word on their creativity. It seems that could be the motto behind your label. Right ? Could you introduce us to some of the acts on your label ? (names, how you met, anecdotes...)**

we try indeed to release new interesting sounds and composers. but also I think that creating and nourishing a label is to establish a new map, set unsuspected coordinates for listening, provide new connections. no worries about genres and silly fancy tendencies. bearing this in mind, we released the intriguing work of rene bertholo, a well-known portuguese (plastic and visual) artist that was born in 1934 and since 1973, I think, started secretly to build machines to make sound, weird handmade synthesizers which he faced as a work in progress for almost 30 years, without any conviction of its musical value. amazingly, the man would write all the tunes bite by bite, which, if you think about it, it's something completely crazy. the machine is really huge, and it has this very funny lights that go on and off according to the sound. well, we made his first (reluctant) public appearance in 1996 at a bookshop in lisbon, and I thought: this guy is unique. so when I started the label, I thought about portuguese artists to release and couldn't make up my mind about it, until I remembered bertholo's work and got so excited that I didn't rest until I found his phone number and made him a dishonest proposition: release his sound work. the

man laughed and call me crazy. he said: this is not music, forget it. but I insisted so much that in the end he finally handed me the tapes.



- **I have noticed in your list of distributors that some of the companies are mailorder rather than proper distributors, or better say mailorder-lists that have extended their activities and sell to some very specialised Indie record stores. But they do not sell to chain stores. So do you think that it would be useless for your records to reach those music supermarkets ? Do you wish to keep your music within a certain circle of specialized connoisseurs ? Or did you chose to keep things, prices under control and thus avoid mass-distribution in certain countries ?**

I am lucky to work with distributors that respect this music.that's all I care for. I am aware that this kind of music is for a minimal number of people, not for indiscriminated masses. who would ever buy this in a supermarket? I have been offered contracts for exclusive distribution in a given country and I refused. I prefer to sell small amounts that I know will go to the people that are really interested.

- **Today, there are more and more chain stores and less and less passionate/smaller record shops. Are you affected by that (de)evolution, or did you deliberately chose to stay away from that "market" ?**

the kind of music that I am interested in, it's quite allergic to market tendencies. it depends always in a very narrow amount of high-demanding consumers. for example, united states distributors are my main clients, and you can't find there a regular magazine to promote our activities, releases etc. so people find about us through very different ways other than the market operating scheme.

- **What gave you the reason, or motivation to start your label ? Weren't you satisfied with other labels'music ?**

There are some interesting labels out there but usually they hard to find in portugal.

The idea of putting out a new label like a sirr came out from the fact that didn't exist any label here with an international distribution, interested both on the local scene and in trespassing the local boundaries. but more important, the motivation lies on the capacity to build a corpus of works that can somehow secretly connect with each other, works that avoid genre and standardization, that deal with sound in a refreshing or extreme way.



- **Did you start with a certain idea, concept ?**

electronic music that defies the habit of listening. and that makes you think.

- **How would you describe a typical Sirr. Ecords act ? How did you chose the name of the label ? Why ?**

Sirr means 'secret' in arab language. why? because I am not interested in evidences, I am not interested in common sense, I am not interested in clichés, I am not interested in commerce. sirr [secret] implies something intimate, something you can share. not necessarily obscure or esoteric. a typical sirr would be atypical. although, of course, I have my influences and some parti-pris.

- **Most labels have an example, or a favorite other label which they like, and you ? Any label you could say was an influence on you ?**

mmh, lovely music, touch (specially in the eighties), trente oiseaux, for 4 ears, XI and lots of others.

- **Any label that you think has been influenced by yours ?**

too young for that, i guess.



- You pay a lot of attention to packaging and your website is good-looking. Could you give us details on the person in charge of the design ? What is according to you the most beautiful record/art-object you ever issued ?

marc behrens, who is also a musician, designs most of the covers. I designed the site although I am not a designer. unfortunately, we can not spend too much money in packaging, so we are keeping it in standard jewel cases. I like the behrens and the arg cd (sirr004 ans sirr008) but this a bit of an arbitrary choice. The others are great too.

- Often people do not consider "microsounds" to be rich and believe that very few is happening... Often associating it with the theory of "less is more", whereas a lot of things and ideas can be noticed in the music of many so-called "microsound" artists. Would you say that this is because many listeners :
 - a) do not listen
 - b) do not care
 - c) can't understand the subtelties

everyday we are being polluted and massacred with incredible levels of noise. this violence sells. tv, commercials, cinema, explore it ad nauseum. so, of course, it's difficult to focus on sounds that deal with the treshold of listening, of silence. people have to re-learn how to listen. this means not being merely passive, and reacting pavlovianly to bursts, beats and easy chorus. one interesting thing about "microsound" music is the aspect of time. "microsound explores a subjective duration, and its unstable physical surface demands new forms of attention, involvement.



- **Could you give us some precisions on the actual scene in Portugal ? Any other label, activists that you feel close to ?**

the scene has been growing recently. labels like 'variz' or 'grainofsound' started out with records, promoting concerts, festivals, etc. so there is an incipient but increasingly dynamic pulse, despite the institucional absence of support (an exception should be made to the Museum of Serralves that has a very interesting programation). @c and [des]integração, both ensembles of laptop-based musicians combining sound, graphics and video, have been very active and display an exciting approach.

carlos zingaro should be mentioned as a precursor of this melting pot, as he started to use electronics in the late seventies, he was always open to sound chalenges and crossovers between genre and media. I am now making an association with him called "granular", dedicated to the promotion of new media.

- **How does your selection process work? Are they pieces personally requested, or volunteered to you ?**

both. I'm pretty open. I make my own programming, I contact the musicians, etc. but sometimes I can receive a demo and say "this is great!, lets release it".

- **Is there anything that you regret or that you'd change if you could ?**

lots of them. I like changes. but one has to move onward.

- **Any album or band that you wish you had issued on SIRR. Records ?**

definitely, sensorband live stuff. and toshiya tsunoda, which i hope i will issue soon.

- **What are your goal as a label. Futureplans ?**

releasing good stuff. even if (almost) secretly...

I also have 3 projects for the next 2 years: a compilation featuring relations between sound and architecture, another one about language, coordinated by me and brandon labelle, and a last one about lisbon sounds, the city I live in.



- **Upcoming releases ?**

-oren ambarchi/ phiilp samatzis/gunter mueler

-janeke shaeffer

-brandon labelle

-steve roden

-e'n

- vitriol

-pimmon

-marc behrens

well, this will take a year...