

C A R P A R K

Carpark is a label located in New-York, directed by Todd Hymen, who replied to our questions on August 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 1973 in louisville, kentucky in a fairly stereotypical american suburban environment. i received a bachelor's degree from northwestern university in chicago and a master's from the john logie baird centre in glasgow, scotland. i was really into music in high school but my options were limited being in louisville. there was no college radio and all my friends listened to classic rock. i was basically the only person in my high school class who liked bands like mudhoney and the stone roses! ☺

upon arriving in Chicago for college i immediately immersed myself in the "indie" culture of 1991. i went to at least 3 or 4 shows every week. i interned at touch and go records. i started working at the college radio station (wnur) at northwestern and became music director my last two years there. that's when i began involved with music on a professional level. This is when I started meeting people at various record labels because they were calling to see how their records were doing.

after graduation, i moved to new york where i worked/interned at labels like matador and bar none. most of my working time was as the indie buyer at kim's west. it was in new york that i started to become more interested in "electronic music." i wasn't happy in new york then so i moved back to chicago after a year. i didn't do much in chicago but continued to do radio shows on wnur.

then i moved to glasgow to get a masters in media studies with a specialization in popular music studies. i went to study under simon frith (brother of fred frith!) in a 12 month program.

after the course i moved back to new york and worked at my friend's record shop etherea. we started up a weekly dj night to play the sort of music that people then were calling "IDM" or "experimental electronics" because no one else in the city was doing it. the night was called invisible cities (www.carparkrecords.com/icities.html). after a month or two we began bringing in live laptop acts. there were so many people looking to play that eventually we were having live acts every week! it occurred to me that there was a lot of great music being made in this country, but there wasn't a really solid record label to represent them. many US artists were having their music released on small US labels or bigger european labels. i thought there was really a need for a professionally run US electronic label so carpark was born!

- 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 ?



well in terms of advice i would say it depends on what kind of label someone wants to run. if someone wants to start a cdr label there isn't much risk or cash upfront involved so things are easier on that end. however distribution is harder because many distributors don't want to deal with cdrs. there are definitely many parallels between tape and cdr labels. seems like there is more time saved making cdr copies though which is important if you are selling a lot of items.

another issue is are you starting a cdr-label just to get the music out there or are you trying to make money? making cassettes was really the only option pre-internet. today you can put your music online for anyone to hear, so if you just wanna get your music out there you don't even need physical artefacts anymore.

if you're trying to start up a non-cdr label you'll need to work a lot and have a little money saved up. it's hard to keep a release schedule if you have to keep waiting for payment from a distributor. and you have to stick to it.

- **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...)**

yes...i definitely think the role of the label is to act as a cultural gatekeeper. otherwise there isn't much to separate carpark from the person who sends you an email with his mp3.com link.

introducing the carpark lot:

marumari - met him through the invisible cities night. Invisible cities was working with the lucky kitchen label on a night which featured marumari, hrvatski, suetsu, paddington breaks, adrien 75, and alejandra and underwood. i was totally into marumari's set. after the show i asked aeron of lucky kitchen if he could give me marumari's info. i contacted josh marumari about releasing his records and he said ok. that was that. intially the first marumari record was going to come out on vinyl communications and carpark was going to do the vinyl. months passed and i never heard anything from vinyl communications. finally kid606 (whose brother i think ran vinyl communications) told me that carpark could put out "ballad of the round ball" on cd and lp. that's why the first two marumari records came out so close together.

jake mandell - i am a big fan of his music so i just called him up and asked if i could release an ep of his. we've been friends ever since!

so takahashi - i also met so through the invisible cities night. he had sold his first cdr to the record shop etherea on consignment. we contacted him and asked if he wanted to play live. then i asked him if i could release his record. so lives in new york, works as a graphic designer, and is now the "carpark art director".

kid606 - once again i met him through the invisible cities night. back in the summer of 1999 there was the soundboy yakuza tour featuring newcomers at the time kid606, cex, lexaunculpt, cathars, and hrvatski. at first they had this woman in california booking the tour, but they got annoyed with her and decided to do it themselves. so one day i get a call from miguel (kid606) about setting up a new york show. after the show we decided to do a record together.

takagi masakatsu - i met him through so takahashi. i forget the whole story now. i think takagi was in new york promoting his art and a friend of his who was friends with so takahashi recommended he drop off some cds with me. So, takagi and his girlfriend stopped into etherea, dropped off a bunch of cds, wandered around a few minutes, and left. i got home, listened to the cds, and thought they were great. so i emailed takagi and asked if he was interested in working with carpark.

greg davis - another invisible cities performer! we had an autumn records (greg's label) night once featuring greg and his friend don mennerich. coincidentally enough the next time i saw greg was at the bip-hop night in brooklyn last summer! he gave me a cdr with some of his new songs and that's how "arbor" came to be.

ogurusu norihide - he's a friend of takagi masakatsu. his cd is the only demo that i've received that i liked enough to release!

dinky - no crazy stories with dinky. i've been friends with her for years. see her at shows around the city all the time. finally we agreed to work together.

signer - simple story. i loved signer's first record "giving it up to feel effected". i liked it so much i emailed him and asked if i could release his next one.

casino versus japan - i've known erik for years as well. he's a big fan of carpark and i'm a big fan of casino versus japan. that's about it.

kit clayton vs. safety scissors - met them both through invisible cities. kit clayton was one of our first live guests back in the spring of 1999. no one really knew who he was then (including me!) however i liked his set so much i asked him if he would do a record for carpark. same for safety scissors. he made his new york city debut at invisible cities in the winter of 2000.

242.pilots - kurt ralske and lukasz lysakowski hung out at invisible cities quite a bit. eventually they asked us if they could do live video during the night, which they did until we stopped doing the night. the two have been doing video with hc gilje for

about a year now. Kurt and lukasz continue to do video for some of the higher-profile electronic shows in town.

- 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?

hmm...I'm not sure what you mean here. I have access to chain stores in most of the countries/markets I have distribution in. on my website I have two separate lists: one for mail order people/shops and one for distributors. I only deal with a few mail order companies direct and the rest get the music from other distributors. Carpark is trying to get its music out to as many people as possible. In some countries this means going to a small store, in others it might mean going to a chain store.



- 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" ?

I'm not doing anything consciously to stay out of the larger market. Carpark cds do sell in chain stores like virgin, tower, and hmv in North America. I know carpark cds are selling in these and similar-type stores in japan and Europe. People in japan tell me that greg davis has been in a tower listening station and that so takahashi cds were being sold right next to the cash register! The main affect all this has on carpark is that we have to sell cds at a cheaper than normal price to get them into the bigger shops in America.

From a new york city perspective I think most of the smaller shops are doing quite well and it's the larger chain stores that are having the problems. Tower sold off its Japanese and Canadian branches and almost went bankrupt in the states! Other large chains in north America have gone out of business. Some of america's largest distributors have gone under.

I think consumers are more passionate than ever about wanting to support independent music shops.

Of course I'm living in new york and don't know what it's like for someone in a small town whose only place to buy music is wal-mart. Then the internet helps.

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

I want carpark to be a label associated with quality electronic music. I am not interested in there being a "carpark sound." Most of all I simply want to release music I like. I actively seek out all types of electronic/digital music, whether it's noise, pop, techno, or whatever.

- **Parking your car mustn't be easy in NY, how would you describe a typical Carpark act ? How did you chose the name of the label ? Why ? You don't like to drive ?**

dunno if there's a typical carpark act. Here are some ideas/concepts that I think can be associated with carpark: simplicity, pop, minimal, forward-thinking.

I was brainstorming names for a label. I still have the sheet of paper with all the names. I liked carpark the best. It is an English word but isn't used in America (being the british term for what Americans call a parking garage or parking lot.) so carpark was familiar but foreign and meaningless at the same time. Carpark sounded nice to say. It looked good in print and was simple. That was that. I don't mind driving. i've spent many years driving in Chicago and Louisville!

- **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 ?**

When I started carpark I was modeling it conceptually on labels like matador or thrilljockey. This is in the sense that they were quality labels releasing different kinds of music. People could depend on them for exciting sounds. Of course carpark is much different sonically from those labels, but you need to start somewhere!

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



Don't know about this one. 😊

- **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 ?**

I handle the artwork on a project by project basis. Many artists produce their own artwork. I did the artwork for the jake mandell placekick ep and the kid606 soccergirl ep. Other than that every artist has either done the artwork themselves or asked a friend to do it. The only exception is that we had so takahashi design the ogurusu norihide cd.

Hmm...dunno if I can say what the most beautiful carpark release is. Of course I like them all and don't like to pick favorites.

- **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 subtleties

it's hard to really know what people are thinking. You'd have to do a sociological study to find out more about this. ☺ I would say there are probably a lot of things going on to produce this kind of response. Chances are the people who say little is happening are the people who won't like the music anyway so that is their response. These are the people who don't really care and are not listening. Then there are people who have not been exposed to a lot of minimal music and perhaps don't know how to listen to it.

This applies to all genres of music. Someone who doesn't listen to dancehall for instance thinks it all sounds the same. Same would apply to "microsound." Minimal music is very hard to digest for a culture where the norm is usually 4/4 12 tone pop music.

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

new york is very into itself right now. Fans and the press are going crazy over any band that sounds "post-punk" or "electro." I don't mind some of the electro stuff, but a good deal of it isn't very good. I find the whole post punk revival a bit annoying actually. I'm a huge fan of that musical period, so I'm continually disappointed on how little new ground is being broken in this area. Most of the new york "post-punk" bands sound like public image or gang of four cover bands. This makes me sad. What makes me sadder is that no one seems to mind. I think fans are just excited about being excited. I'm hoping someone will bring something new to the table. I know many of the people involved in electronic/digital music in new york and throughout the world. I've worked with tomlab, audio dregs, progressive form, tigerbeat6, orthlorng musork, hefty, plug research, mille plateaux, outward music, and many more.

- **Anything to say on the musical situation of USA today ?**

I wish people would get over the post-punk fetish. Can't wait for the late 80s revival! Hope more people in this country will understand that performing live with a laptop is just as viable as an acoustic live show.

- **How does your selection process work? Are they pieces personally requested, or volunteered to you ? You have started a series related to sports games with every CD shaped accordingly to each discipline. Could you please explain this process to our readers ?**

I do my best to stay out of the selection process. If an artist wants my opinion about their music I will give it to them, but normally I prefer the artist to take care of these matters. Sometimes an artist will want me to pick my favorite tracks for a cd which I'm happy to do. Also I occasionally get a request to order the tracks. the sports-FAN cd series is coming to a close in November. The third one took much longer than expected to complete, so I think it is time to put the series to rest. For this series, I asked a musician to pick a sport and make a short ep (no more than 19 minutes) based somehow on it. That was all I said. From there it's up to the listener. The kit clayton/safety scissors "ping pong ep" will come out in November. This ep

was based around an actual ping pong match. The two recorded sounds from their game and incorporated them into their compositions. The track titles are the point tallies (i.e. 1-0, 2-0, 2-1, 3-1 etc) should be hot!



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

nothing too big, just not dealing with certain delinquent distributors or lazy promoters.

- **Any album or band that you wish you had issued on Carpark ?**

freescha 6 song ep.

ISAN "salamander"

Safety Scissors "parts water"

Languis "unithematic"

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

to keep doing what I'm doing. Hope to keep selling more cds and records!

*** Upcoming releases ? Please give some details on every band, name of the record, etc...**

august – signer "low light dreams"

September – casino versus japan "whole numbers play the basics"

October – carpark is working with post punk label acute records on a theoretical girls "theoretical record" reissue. They were a late 70s new york no wave band featuring glenn branca and Wharton tiers. First time this music has ever been available!

November – kit clayton/safety scissors – "ping pong ep"

242.pilots – live in bruxelles dvd – featuring kurt ralske (ex-ultra vivid scene, cathars), lukasz lysakowski, and hc gilje. Improvised laptop video. One trio piece, three solo works, and a documentary from Belgian French-speaking national television.

discography :

www.carparkrecords.com/catalog.html
www.carparkrecords.com/carparkshop.html

crpk023: V/A - wanna buy a craprak? cd compilation
crpk022 - kit clayton/safety scissors ping pong cd
crpk021- 242.pilots dvd - featuring kurt ralske (ex-cathars, ultra vivid scene), lukasz lysakowski, and JC gilje.

[crpk020 signer - low light dreams cd/double lp](#)
[crpk019 carpark t-shirt](#)
[crpk018 casino vs. japan cd/lp](#)
[crpk017 takagi masakatsu - opus pia cd](#)
[crpk016 takagi masakatsu - opus pia dvd](#)
[crpk015 ogurusu norihide - humour cd](#)
[crpk014 marumari remix cd](#)
[crpk013 carpark keychain with infrared light](#)
[crpk012 greg davis - arbor cd/lp](#)
[crpk011 miss dinky "kill the bass kick ep" 12"](#)
[crpk010 takagi masakatsu "pia" double cd](#)
[crpk009 marumari - supermogadon cd/lp](#)
[crpk008 jake mandell - love songs for machines cd/lp](#)
[crpk007 so takahashi 30/30 cd](#)
[crpk006 kid606 - soccergirl cd ep](#)
[crpk05.6 so takahashi 12" - repress of crpk5 with new a-side](#)
[crpk005 so takahashi 12"](#)
[crpk004 marumari - the wolve's hollow cd/lp](#)
[crpk003 so takahashi - nubus cd/lp](#)
[crpk002 marumari - ballad of the round ball cd/lp](#)
[crpk001 jake mandell - the placekick cd ep](#)