

I N T R A N S I T I V E



Intransitive records is a label based in Boston, directed by Howard Stelzer who answered our questions on September 16th, 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.**

I'm 27 years old, born in Brooklyn (New York). I lived on Long Island until I was 13, then the family went south to Florida, where I stayed for high school and college. I've been in the wonderful city of Boston for the past four years. I'm currently in the graduate program for Inter-related Media at the Massachusetts College of Art, where I study sound performance and artsy crap like that.

- **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 ?**

I suppose CDRs are more affordable for small labels than pressing duplicated CDs, but in my experience people and distributors are more likely to buy duplicated CDs than CDRs, so it's a trade-off. If you spend more money up front, you might sell more and get the music to more people. I'm not sure why the public perception of CDRs is different from CDs, but that's how it is. My advice to folks starting a label is: stay with it! If sales aren't amazing right away, don't be discouraged. Keep on making the records of the music you believe in, and eventually your staying power will give the label its own momentum. There are too many labels that begin, publish two things, then vanish when the publisher realizes that it's hard work. That's a disservice to the music, but also a shame because maybe if the label just carried on a little longer, that one extra distributor might have picked up some more titles. The business end of things isn't my specialty, but that's my advice.

- **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 ?**

I wouldn't say so. Many of the artists whose work appears on Intransitive are folks whose music I've been excited about since I was young. Brume, for example, is someone whose music first excited me when I was 16 years old and in high school. Frans de Waard's Kapotte Muziek records and cassettes are things I've been listening to for years and years. Same with Marc Behrens and others. In many cases, I use the label to give something back (in a way) to the artists who I admire by publishing their new works. The VARIOUS 2CD was like this as well... I had the chance to publish short pieces by artists whose work I felt strongly about, like Kevin Drumm, Martin Tetreault, Taylor Deupree. None of these were new acts, really, and my concern was more with creating a good, coherent compilation than with introducing artists to listeners or vice versa. I suppose Loren Boyer isn't terribly well-known, and perhaps Jason Lescalleet wasn't so known when I published his collaborative CD with nmperign. But I don't see Intransitive as having a missionary or talent-scout role. Rather, I just publish the music that I love and believe in.

- **Could you introduce us to some of the acts on your label ? (names, how you met, anecdotes...)**

Sure. To start at the beginning, the Amazing Mr.Slug is somewhat legendary among music-types in Florida. Someone in Gainesville, FL, published that 7 » of his noise and then moved away, abandoning boxes of the record in somebody's closet. I tracked the guy down and asked him if I could try to sell all the copies, and he gave them to me. Slug is a guy whose name is actually Frog (really !), an obsessive music-maker and performance artist who is still very active in the town of Gainesville. Kapotte Muziek is Frans de Waard, of course. He lives in Nijmegen in the Netherlands, and works at Staalplaat. We've been friends for years, mostly via email, though I had the pleasure of touring the States with him and Roel Meelkop and Peter Duimelinks (and my music partner Jason Talbot) a few months ago... that was a lot of fun. Frans and I met when I started writing for his Vital Weekly magazine, which unfortunately I've been too busy to continue to do. In 1998, Frans had suggested to Roel that he contact me about maybe releasing a CD of his old cassette recordings, so that's how I met Roel. I love old noise tapes and analogue sounds, so the idea of noisy, weird recordings by this guy whose current work is very clean and precise really appealed to me. I like his « 6 (Mailcop Rules) » CD very much, especially because it's so different from his other, more widely heard, work. Parts of it aren't so serious, I like that. Both Roel and Frans are just incredibly cool guys whose sense of humor really comes through in their music. By the way, we're working on an album of compositions using our collaborative recordings from the tour as source material. I'm excited to hear how that turns out. Brume is Christian Renou, from France. He puts out so many albums that I think many people don't notice how detailed and complex each one is. There are a lot of them, but they really are fully realized works. Christian will have his day when he's acknowledged as the brilliant composer that he is, just you wait and see. I've never met him, but as soon as I decided to publish CDs by other people, I found his

address and wrote him a letter. He was completing « Krieg » at the time, sent me a rough mix, and that was the start of that. My musical partner, Jason Talbot, and I are starting a collaborative project with Christian as well, using only tape sounds.

Richard Chartier and I met over email in 1997 when he was selling off some old CDs from his collection. We traded tapes through the mail of each other's material (he was doing Lustmord-style dark-ambient at the time, if you can believe that) and we became friends. I mentioned that I was starting a label, he mentioned that he was a graphic designer, and that's how he became Intransitive's first graphic designer. Easy ! His « Direct. Incidental. Consequential » album was a real surprise to me when I first heard it. It was so different from his earlier tapes, a totally different idea, really strong. I guess at the time he was listening to a lot of Ryoji

Ikeda and Bernhard Gunter, and it shows. I'm not sure if Richard still likes this album, but I do. The low frequencies are incredible, and there's so much happening. His composition style evolved very quickly after that album.

Jason Lescalleet was the first guy I met when I moved to Boston. I saw him open up for Borbetomagus in a group with Lawrence Cook (drums), Greg Kelley (trumpet) and Vic Rawlings (cello), and was blown away. Later, I met Jason up at RRRon's store and we talked about tapes, tapeloops, records... the normal stuff, y'know. We hit it off right away. He offered to « show me Boston », which meant taking me to his favorite ice cream shop (it's called Toscanini's in Cambridge... if you're ever there, try the burnt caramel !) and then to hear a band called FETISH, comprised of folks who are now my good friends. I had never heard free improv before, but FETISH were almost an anti-improv group. Really loud and uncomfortable, most of Boston hated them... they were great ! But it's better to hear them than to try to describe them. There's a CD you can get from twistedvillage.com if you're at all curious. Anyway, now Lescalleet's one of my favorite people.

I met John Hudak through Jason, since they had been corresponding and eventually they did the concert that would be the basis for « Figure 2 ». John has come up to perform solo in Boston since then. I liked his pre-laptop stuff quite a bit, but his current work is pretty good also. I'm just biased against laptop music, but John does it well.

Loren Boyer is someone I know from Florida, we used to perform together. He lives in Boston now and plays in an electronics duo called Horse Sinister. He and I are in a rock band called Thundercough Falconbird... it's fun. I play drums, he's the singer. I can't really think of good stories about everyone else on the label... mostly, they're all people whose work I love, so we got in touch somehow.

- 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 ?

My biggest distributors are Forced Exposure, Anomalous, Metamkine, and Digital Narcis, all of whom probably think of themselves as « proper » and all of them sell to stores as well as mailorder. I have no agenda like what you imply, I want people to have access to Intransitive CDs as easily as they can. Hell, I'm no elitist. The fact is, chain stores in the States can stock discs from labels as small as mine only if they buy from Dutch East India, who are well-known for their practice of not paying labels anything.

Perhaps you've had a better experience with them, but then you'd be in the minority. The kind of music I publish sells to stores that do specialize, that is true. But your question seems to suggest that I wish to hide the music from all but a chosen few, and that's just not the case.

In other countries... well, in Europe, people can buy Intransitive CDs from Sound323 (in the UK), Metamkine (in France), Staalplaat and V2 (the Netherlands), Fringes, (Italy), Lowlands (Belgium), Rotor (Spain), M.DOS (Austria), Artware (Germany)... I think that's a lot ! Intransitive is also distributed by Dorobo and Synaesthesia in Australia, Digital Narcis in Japan, probably some others that I'm forgetting. So the distribution is pretty wide. If some huge distributor wanted to buy 1000 Intransitive CDs, I would have no ethical problem in selling to them. I wish thousands of people loved Roel Meelkop's music as much as I do ! That would be great for Roel, I'm sure. He could retire and just make disco 7 »s...

- **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" ?**

Er... how popular do suppose M.Behrens is ? He's great, but you won't ever find him filed next to Britney Spears at the Virgin Megastore! Be realistic. I don't even think selling to chain stores is an option on my part as a publisher. It would make as much sense for me to sell John Hudak CDs at a fish market as it would to sell them at a chain store. There would be just as many people who might come in to the fish market looking for a John Hudak CD. Realistically, there are the shops that sell this kind of music, and people who are interested in it find those shops.

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

Are you suggesting that one starts publishing CDs and records because all others are unsatisfying ? I started the label because I love music, and I love recordings, and I get pleasure from publishing new pieces of music. I was, and am, satisfied with many other labels' output, and receive inspiration from many of them.

I suppose the real, technical reason for starting Intransitive was to publish my own work. I had recorded « Stone Blind », a one-hour-long tape piece, and knew that no one outside of Florida had ever heard of me, so no one would have any reason to put it out. I just did it myself, and subsequently fell in love with the idea of putting out CDs. These days, if I like an artist's work, I am in the wonderful position of being able to offer that artist a release. It's an honor, truly, and a source of pride.



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

Not really, no. I love electronic and electro-acoustic music, so I publish the works that move me. The starting concept, as I said, was to publish my own music, but I outgrew that very quickly.

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

There isn't a typical Intransitive act, per se. I also don't think I would call any of the artists whose work has appeared on the label « Intransitive acts », since no one artist is committed to my label, and I tend not to promote any act as my own exclusive discovery. I promote individual works. Any artist can have other works on other labels, and of course that's fine with me. I don't expect otherwise.

I do have some criteria for what makes an Intransitive album, though they are mainly negative criteria ; I know what I won't publish. I don't want to publish the same record again and again, so I won't publish something that, to me, sounds derivative of something else. I'm not interested in what is commonly referred to as « improv », though certainly there is some improvised music which I feel transcends the genre. I am not interested in publishing melodic music or tunes, or beats, or anything like that. Nothing « dark » or any bogus tough-guy noise poses, or anything silly like that. I prefer work that is more than a genre exercise, and anything that has Jason Lescalleet in it.

As for the name... I studied English in college, and Intransitive is a term from English grammar. It describes a verb with no object, no thing which receives the action. For example, « Mary played beautifully ». What did Mary play ? We don't know. So, « played » in this case is intransitive. The idea of something which did not refer to anything in particular appealed to me. One could extend that to suggest that Intransitive CDs refer only to themselves. Maybe it's pretentious, I dunno. I'm stuck with it now.

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

RRRecords was an enormous influence on my taste and interest in music, and truly changed my life. I cannot overstate my respect and admiration for Ron Lessard. His label had no agenda, he simply published the music he liked regardless of what any audience might have thought of it, what he might have thought people expected of him, or even whether anyone else would see quality in a piece of music that Ron liked. Noise, punk, pop, industrial, all that mattered was that Ron liked it. He has real integrity. When I moved to Boston, I immediately sought Ron out and became friends with him. I would take the train up to Lowell and hang out at his store for hours, staring at all the stupid Doc Wor Mirran LPs until the next train back to Boston came. Selektion also was fantastic... such a strange and fascinating aesthetic, unlike anything else that I'd heard when I was young. Actually, I discovered RRR when some guy in a record store in Miami handed me a RRRecords catalog and said, « Order anything from this catalog at random... you'll never go to a record store again ». I was intrigued, of course, so I ordered the most forbidding-looking band names I could find, all the bands with letters and numbers for names. Which led me straight to Selektion. I like what Selektion does now, but I really love that classic era of SBOTHI and P16.D4 records. The records seem to be clinical and cold and devoid of human emotion, at least at first glance, but after much exposure to them the music comes through as strangely passionate and humorous. Those SBOTHI LPs are like nothing else in the world, man oh man. The track « Half Cut Cows » by P16.D4 is one of the most beautiful and inspiring pieces of music I know. It's on the « acRID acME (of P16.D4 » album... what a great title ! It looks like a math problem ! So cool. As far as another label being influenced by Intransitive... er, I doubt it.

- **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 ?**

The website was designed by my friend Seth Cluett, who is also a sound artist and improviser who used to live here in Boston. He lives in upstate New York now. The packages were designed by Richard Chartier for awhile ; I'd say he is responsible for the streamlined appearance of the releases. I decided to keep packages as simple and non-referential as possible so that the music and the text could be of primary importance. Now I am rethinking the look of the label so I'm not sure who will design future releases. I'd like to introduce more images, but I'm still unsure of how. We'll see.



- **What is according to you the most beautiful record/art-object you ever issued ?**

They all kinda look the same, man...

Though I did do one unplayable record/CD object thing with a guy called tac, a musician from Tennessee. It looked good, and was a play on the idea of packaging for music. This one contained no music, but lots of descriptions of record packaging ideas. Dunno if I'd call it beautiful, but it turned out pretty well.

- **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**

I would be careful about associating volume with a qualitative hierarchy. I think that some very quiet music can just not have a lot of thought behind it, and that some very loud music can be truly beautiful, as well as the other way around. Personally, I prefer not to dwell on issues of volume or genre; after all, if a piece of music has something to say, a category like « microsound » doesn't mean very much, does it ? When bernhard gunter recorded « Un Peu de Neige Salie », I'm certain he regarded it only as a piece of music which made sense to him and was judged complete on its own terms. « Microsound », as a term, arrived years afterwards and only then began to inspire people to create music to fit it. many of those people will never have another idea beyond trying to fit their conception of « micro-sound », so good riddance to them.

There can be very quiet music that is also not particularly subtle. Someone can just not have much to say, so they make their statement by not saying much, implying more than perhaps is there. To illustrate : my problem with many hard-noise acts is that they have nothing to say, so they turn everything on and desperately try to keep any sound happening, hoping that (warning : cliché ahead !) if they throw enough crap at the wall, some of it will stick. A similar thing happens with « microsound » ;

there are lots of bad records that are quiet and digital-clean just because quietness and cleanliness is the start and end of the statement, and that's just as uninteresting to me as generic noise or noodley improv. I disagree that less is more... sometimes, it's just less.

But I'm not sure why you ask, since Intransitive doesn't publish « micro-sound ». Unless you count nmperrign, who can be pretty quiet sometimes. I'm fairly certain that they don't think about what style of music they're playing, though. They just make the music and let others worry about what it is.

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

Boston is the greatest city ! I LOVE Boston. I love it every day, as I have for years. I walk around the city and cannot help but smile because I'm so damn happy to be here. The scene for creative music is very good here... there's a nice cross-over among electronic-music composers like Brendan Murray and Jason Lescalleet (who recently moved up to Maine, but is still generally considered part of Boston's « scene »), improvisers like Mike Bullock, nmperrign and Vic Rawlings, and noise artists like Donna Parker, Jessica Rylan and Emil Beaulieu. There are so many people making interesting music here, lots of places to play (gallery spaces, dance studios, rock bars, you name it), a few record labels (Sedimental, Chloe, Twisted Village), and an audience that seems to enjoy the stuff. A record store called Twisted Village is pretty much the center of it all, sorta the hub of the scene whether they want to be or not. Most of the musicians here tend to meet up at Twisted Village on Saturday mornings, all of us waiting for the new arrivals to be priced. The scene here is also very critical of itself, mostly in a constructive way. People are brave enough to be always trying out new ideas, and other musicians are happy to discuss people's work. I find playing in Boston to be a learning experience.

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

You may not know this, but Chicago has a quality scene for electronic and improvised music. There's Kevin Drumm, Illusion of Safety, and TV Pow, who you might already know, and also Mora, Couerl, Seafoam, EKG, Olivia Block, and Vertonen, among others. BOXmedia is a good Chicago label, so is Crank Satori and Crippled Intellect. Jason Talbot and I feel a good connection between the music in Boston and the music in Chicago. It's a real nice city.

And by the way... Dan Burke from Illusion of Safety makes some of the most delicious pizza I've ever had. If you're ever in Chicago, stop by his shop !

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

There are many ways that an album becomes published on Intransitive. For the most part, I ask artists that I'm interested in for an album.

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

No, I'm pretty happy with the label as it is. It's The Big Love, the one thing that keeps me going... besides my own music, of course.

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

« Life With the Lions » by John Lennon and Yoko Ono, or « Buncha Hair That Long » by Borbetomagus.

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

To keep on doing what I'm doing, I suppose. I'm considering moving to Montreal after graduate school, since that's the only city that I think gets me as excited as Boston does. I might need a change of pace in couple of years, but who really knows. Great food up there, too. Smoked meat at Schwartz' Charcuterie Hebraique, mmmmm....

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

I'm planning a 2CD compilation of computer-free music, all analogue, tape, and/or acoustic sound. Tracks by Artificial Memory Trace, Magali Babin, Jonathan Coleclough/Colin Potter, Le Quan Ninh, Nerve Net Noise, Haco/View Masters, Animist Orchestra, Gal, Eric la Casa, Olivia Block, Giuseppe Ielasi, Atau Tanaka, Ronnie Sundin, Jason Talbot, Thomas Ankersmit, Hidekai Shimada (Agencement), Das Synthetische Mischgewebe, Frans de Waard, nmperign, Alexandre St.Onge, Francisco Lopez, MNortham. That should be ready in a couple of months if all goes as planned.

I'm doing a CD of my duo with Jason Talbot, which is my main musical project. That one will be called «Songs ». After all that, a CD by Roel Meelkop « 5 (Ambiances) », one by MNortham called « Circulating Phases », Kapotte Muziek/Lethe (this one doesn't have a title yet), and a 2CD by nmperign and Jason Lescalleet called « Love Me Two Times ». Beyond that, I have some ideas that I'll keep to myself for now. Something else by Nerve Net Noise in 2003... I think they're brilliant, so I'll publish anything they want published.

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