

T H E F O U N D R Y

The foundry is a label based in the US of A, directed by Michael Bentley 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.

I was born in the early sixties (there must be SOME mystery! (laughs)) and grew up mostly in the American Mid-West, spending time in Iowa, Wisconsin and in Ann Arbor, Michigan (my father, a University professor, was doing the Big Ten circuit). When my parents divorced my mother and I moved back to the Bay Area (where both of my parents had grown up) just as I was entering High School, and I've lived here ever since. I attended UC Berkeley and earned a BA in History. Like many I worked in retail during my school days and for a while after graduating, spending a lot of time in the book business, and then moved on to work in typesetting and graphic design, which I've been doing for about 15 years.

I'm not sure any of this helps to make sense of where/who I am today, but there you are...

- Which friendly piece of advice would you give to someone who wants to start his label ?

Don't! (laughs) Well, there's no one secret to starting a label... it's a lot of work, and requires a fair amount of time and more than a little luck. You're not going to get rich or famous starting a label, so if that's what you want try something else! (laughs)

- **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 ?**

CDRs do make it easier to start a label, just as cassettes were a less expensive entree into music in the past. It also allows for very limited runs, which is a good thing for a small label with limited sales. However, CDRs have their own problems. From the retail point of view many distributors and most (in my experience) retailers don't like CDRs (because of quality control issues and returns, I believe), so this places certain limitations on what a CDR label can accomplish. Of course, if you are doing business directly over the internet, this may be a moot point.

In my own experience CDRs are not quite at the same level as glass mastered discs. While many CDRs have the added interest of a presenting a limited edition handmade piece of art, I have definitely experienced more variation in sound quality and other issues of robustness and playability with CDRs than with pressed CDs. So while CDRs certainly do involve less risk, they also have, from my point of view, other problems, which is too bad because it's an interesting format in many ways.

- **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 ?**

While I basically agree I might state it a bit differently. First and foremost I feel that my responsibility is to bring together quality projects, I do not want to waste the listeners' time or money. Along the way being able to meet and collaborate with artists (both known and unknown) is the real payoff for me personally. I enjoy seeing everyone's creativity at play and doing what I can to help/contribute. As for "discovering" new artists (sounds a bit too self important put that way) I guess I like the continuity that a release like Zero Point or 360° has where you have contributions by musicians that are both well known and lesser known.

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

Nathan Kreisberg (the other half of Rhomb)

I've known Nathan for about 25 years now, and we've made music together off and on during much of that time. We discovered a lot of music together, and spent many hours in High School listening to Klaus Schulze, Tangerine Dream, La Dusseldorf, Kraftwerk (and too many others to recall), and also assembled a rudimentary studio during our undergraduate days. Nathan has classical training and has played piano since he was a boy. He is also a physicist, working in aerosol science!

Thermal

I've known Joshua for something like 15 years by now. I met him through a mutual friend by way of long conversations about music. Joshua was in a band called M-1 Alternative, and then branched off into other collaborations and solo efforts. In more recent years, as I returned to making music of my own, Joshua and I have shared information and ideas. Joshua runs his own Boxman Studies label in San Francisco, and has several Thermal CDs coming out in the near future.

(bio on the 360° bio page: <http://www.foundrysite.com/360/bio.html>)

(<http://www.boxmanstudies.com/>)

Seofon

Joshua introduced me to Seofon one night just before we three went on a local radio program to play and promote our (then) latest releases. We hit it off right away, and I've really enjoyed talking and working with Seofon over the last three years. Seofon has a large body of work as part of Ambient Temple of Imagination (ATOI), and continues to explore new ideas on his own and with various collaborators.

(bio at <http://www.foundrysite.com/seofon/zeropoint/bio.html>)

(<http://www.a-toi.com/>)

Dean Santomieri

I've known Dean casually for a long time (maybe 15 years? maybe even 20?), we met through an old girlfriend. Over the years I have done some design work for various of Dean's projects, and we gradually came to discuss our work and ideas more and more. When I was putting together the Archipelago EP series we began to talk specifically about Dean's music (which ended up being the Crude Rotations release), and when I was planning the first Hypnos co-releases, The Boy Beneath the Sea seemed a good fit and way of broadening what the Foundry was doing. Dean works a lot with

video (The Boy Beneath the Sea was originally a live show with video), and has produced some really great pieces, both live and recorded.

(bio at <http://www.foundrysite.com/santomieri/boybeneaththesea/bio.html>).

Jonathan Hughes

Jonathan and I were on the same email list and ended up making contact through an exchange of releases. I was very impressed with what I heard and felt like we had similar ideas and complementary approaches, which has turned out to be true, I think. I really admire Jonathan's work, and I look forward to working with him in the future, in fact we have a couple of things we're kicking around now.

(bio at <http://www.foundrysite.com/hughes/trillium/bio.html>)

(<http://www.dronelab.com/>)

Ben Swire

Seofon handed me a CDR one night and said "listen to this!" I did and really liked what I heard. That CDR turned out to be the Equilibrium EP, and that's how I met Ben. I look forward to collaborating with Ben again, in one form or another.

(bio at <http://www.foundrysite.com/EP/equilibrium/bio.html>)

- **I have noticed that your records are distributed and promoted by Hypnos, a well established company. Has it improved your audience, helped in having the records visible everywhere ? On another hand Hypnos is very specialised in Ambient music, so 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 ?**

First of all, let me say that the collaboration with Hypnos has been enjoyable, and I feel lucky to have made Mike Griffin's acquaintance. Mike and I have been in contact for some years now, and he has been most generous and easy to work with. Working with Hypnos has certainly helped to spread the word about Foundry projects to people who might not have been aware of us otherwise, and it has definitely aided our distribution and ability to make these CDs more widely (and easily) available.

As you point out Hypnos has its own niche, whatever you choose to call it (ambient, dark ambient, whatever). I believe the "Foundry sound" (not that there is such a thing) stretches between a number of styles, genres, and niches, and that it has something to offer to many different listeners. I continue

to try to find ways to let more and different kinds of people know what we're up to. In fact having the chance to do interviews like this is just such an opportunity... thanks! Being pigeon-holed in one way or another is always something I'm fighting against, but it happens a lot, whoever you're working with. As far as growth goes, I think one of things that we're seeing at this point in time is a shift in the music business. New tools (such as the internet) are definitely changing the way the musicians and labels can contact listeners/customers, and therefore changing the dynamics of the business, though it's still early in this process. Being able to keep prices down is important (CD prices continue to rise despite lowering production costs... it makes no sense), and creating more opportunities to deal directly with listeners/customers is good for both labels/artists and music lovers. In general I feel it's quite important to have control over what happens with my own music and the music that finds its way onto The Foundry, and that means having to deal with more of the business end of things. Not a part of the project that I particularly enjoy, but it is part of making The Foundry happen.

- **Your records could be labeled Ambient, though they sound far away from the average classical Ambient music. Could we name that Contemporary Ambient music ? What is Ambient music for you ? The term is very controversial, with purist refusing to accept certain beatless music as Ambient... Where do you stand ?**

Of course I am hardly an objective observer when it comes to defining and classifying my own music! For me it encompasses styles ranging from ambient/electonica (i.e. Brian Eno, Apollo/R+S, post techno chillout), space/electronic (i.e. Klaus Schulze, Tonto's Expanding Headband, Kraftwerk), modern classical (i.e. Phillip Glass, Gavin Bryars), microsound (i.e. Mego, Ritornell, Fennesz), experimental (i.e. Mika Vanio, Touch Recordings), and loads of other musical influences (pop, rock, jazz, folk) and combines them into something new and whole and with different layers and access points. I feel a need for myself personally (both as musician and listener), and as someone running a label, to bring different ideas, concepts and styles together. I'm not talking about fusion in the sense that that word has been used to describe hybrid musical styles, but about synthesis. Synthesis of experiences is vital to my own perception of the world and to my creativity, and I think many others feel the same way, so I'm not that interested in arguing about what "ambient" music is or is not,

whether it should contain beats or not or other characteristics. I do the music I want to do and leave it to each listener to define it the way they wish to define it.

Naturally the process of marketing (if I may use such a "dirty" word (laughs)) demands some purple prose and hyperbole, so I am bound to try and find reference points for use in press releases and so forth. Even so, I would like the listener to be free from preconceiving Foundry music as much as is possible, though this is quite difficult. Some folks see the Hypnos name on the recent CDs and think that dictates a certain sound or approach. Others will see that this is from an American label and think that the music will have a specific attitude. I think a lot of folks are actually somewhat surprised when they finally hear the music. My favourite comment has been, "it's more interesting than I thought it would be!" (laughs)

- **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 think that the "bigger = better" thing is happening increasingly in all business, not just in music, which seems sad to me. We're lucky here in the Bay Area that there are some great independent stores (Amoeba, Aquarius, and Mod Lang, among others) that support music that's out of the mainstream. Again, this is an issue in which internet outlets have helped to bypass the monolithic stores (Barnes & Noble, Tower, etc.) that rule the market in so many locales. I have not made a conscious decision to stay away from that market, it just hasn't been relevant to what I've been doing.

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

That's actually difficult to say, there was no single reason. I guess it's been a kind of dream for a long time, something lurking in the back of my head. The Foundry grew out of other creative endeavours (chapbooks, graphics, and finally cassettes), and just evolved into a full blown label. It seemed a natural progression. In any case, I wouldn't say I was dissatisfied with what's out there, but I did feel there was room for what I wanted to do.

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

Yes, lots of specific ideas in fact. Without going through a tedious litany, there were two main starting points: one was practical (wanting to get my own music out there), and the other was more conceptual (wanting to bring artists together in different ways and engender some sort of creative community).

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

I don't think I can describe a "typical" Foundry act other than saying that every release is something that I like (and, of course, a lot of it contains my own work). I think that many of the people I work with are blurring genre lines and bringing together different kinds of sounds and ideas, but other than that it's difficult to have a hard line definition.

The name came from a fictitious record label catalog I was putting together as a design portfolio piece in the early 1980s. It was the name of one of the imaginary bands on an imaginary label. The name stuck in my head, and when I started to put together chapbooks, in 1985, I decided to use The Foundry as my imprint. When I began assembling cassettes of my musical projects (circa 1995) it seemed like an appropriate name for the label.

Let me repeat something I wrote for Foundrysite...

The word foundry captured my imagination because of its many shades of meaning and its implications. There are different varieties of foundry, for machine parts, horseshoes, or even type (I was doing a lot of typesetting in those days... in fact the eM moniker was suggested by the em space, a unit of measurement). I also thought of the foundry as a place you rolled up your sleeves and worked with your hands, a technique I still try to employ even though most of my work is now done on computers. Foundries have also had a pivotal role in developing technology, as a place where machine parts are made and refined, for instance, and this seemed like an amusing connection to the "machine music" I was creating. There is also an implicit alchemical reference since the heart of a foundry is the furnace, a device central to many alchemical transformative processes. I see my Foundry as a place where machines and technology are used as tools to perform magical operations, where emotions and intuition interface with science and knowledge in an attempt to create a new world communicated via sound, image and words.

Perhaps this sounds a bit lofty in the context of this interview, but these ideas speak to the origin of the name and what it has meant (and continues to mean) to me.

- **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 ?**

There were lots of labels that have influenced me in different ways. I think 4AD may have been the first label that I became aware of as a LABEL (at least one that maintained an identity apart from/in addition to the artists), and I liked a lot of what they did in the 80s both in terms of presentation and music. Touch was another influence in terms of both content and packaging, they've put out some fantastic releases! In recent years I've really enjoyed Sabotage, both for the music and for the conceptual art and socio-political pranksterism... great stuff! Other labels that I have admired for various reasons include Harmonia Mundi, Factory, and Dorobo, and I'm sure there are more I'm forgetting.

I couldn't really say whether any labels have been influenced by The Foundry, it's not something I've been made aware of.

- **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 ?**

Thanks you for the kind words about the presentation, that is something on which I spend a lot of time and effort. My day job is in graphic design, so putting together the CD covers and other materials developed naturally from that, and was probably also a reason why I wanted to have my own label... the design another aspect of my artistic endeavours.

As for favourites... I'm pleased with all of the releases in different ways, though I tend to tire of my own design work (an occupational hazard, I think). I like the design of the recent Ben Swire release a lot (it's new, so I'm not tired of it yet (laughs)), and I think the Archipelago 3" EP series turned out really well... it was fun to work with the 3" format! I suppose the release I'm most fond of all around is the Motor Box. For this project I put together a lot of texts and graphics and wrote an essay to go along with the 7" Motor Sessions EP (about 15 minutes of music which we managed to fit onto a 7"

disc) and put it all in a box. It was a lot of fun to work on and the kind of project I'd like to do again at some point.

- **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

This is the kind of question which applies to many varieties of music, not just microsound. I generally subscribe to the less is more camp (though I would not really describe most of my work as minimal), and so I am not bothered by "less is more" in music. However, there has to be something going on in the composition over time to make it interesting to me. This could be something VERY subtle, or something more obvious and even traditional (in a compositional sense). So, to answer your question, I think that it comes down to a matter of taste. Some folks do not enjoy the kind of sounds, development or topography associated with microsound music, and that's fine. Sometimes I do wonder if the music gets a careful listen, but then I think that most folks who are so inclined can hear the subtleties and find something of interest, whether or not it draws them to repeated listenings. I should add that I always feel like there are more people out there who would enjoy any given album than actually manage to find it.

- **Anything to say on the musical situation of USA today ? Could you give us some precisions on the actual scene in California ?**

Another big topic. I'm not really qualified to speak about the musical scene around the country (I'm not sure I'm qualified to speak about the scene here in the Bay Area! (laughs)), but one thing that is important to remember is that the USA is, geographically speaking, a REALLY HUGE place. Economical travel can be difficult and certainly more time consuming than in, for example, Europe (especially if you're on the West Coast), and this makes touring harder for small independent

bands/musicians. The size of the USA also has an impact on distribution... I think it makes it harder to self distribute and encourages the tendency towards chains that can handle the expense and organization of national networking. There are niches to be found, but they seem to lie outside the mainstream.

There don't appear to be a lot of venues dedicated (or even friendly) to presenting ambient/experimental/microsound music in the cities with which I am familiar. It is my opinion (and experience) that what I do is not well suited to clubs and bars where the crowd noise is generally louder than the sounds I'm producing, so that means looking at other kinds of venues. We're lucky here in the Bay Area that there are some other avenues for presenting this kind of material, but even here it's not easy to make a show happen and to get folks to come.

I have attended some events this year, held in warehouse type spaces, that prove that people will come and listen attentively if given the chance. Aaron Ximm has been curating a series at 964 Natoma that has presented some good work (oriented around field recordings) in a comfortable setting, and several other collectives have managed shows doing something similar.

- **Any other label, activists that you feel close to ?**

We have a collective here in the Bay Area (to which I referred elsewhere) called the Archipelago. It was something that developed out of conversations that Thermal, Seofon and I had, and was a development of an idea that Joshua Maremont (Thermal) had originated. It was from this that the Archipelago 3" series was born. Joshua has written a very lucid manifesto (<http://www.boxmanstudies.com/archipelago/manifesto.html>) which explains the concept and origin of the name. At this point it's a loose association that includes, among others, Thermal, Seofon, Dean Santomieri, Ian Stokes, and myself.

Besides Hypnos (which I talked about elsewhere), I have greatly enjoyed corresponding with Robert Jelinek at Sabotage in Vienna and Kim Cascone here in California.

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

It's a combination of things. In some cases I asked a musician to do a piece for The Foundry, and in other cases I have happened upon a completed work that I thought was really strong and intriguing.

The pieces on 360° were all done specifically for that release, whereas Equilibrium came to me in finished form, for instance.

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

I assume you mean in regards to The Foundry, otherwise it's a long list! (laughs)

Well, not really. It's all a learning process (a cliché, but true none the less), so I can't really spend a lot of time worrying about mistakes I've made in the past. If I were doing things over with the knowledge I have now I'm sure I would make some changes in a couple of projects, but I don't really regret the way things went down. One is always limited by resources. Time, money and technology are not infinite, and so a work will take a certain shape. You make the best choices available to you, and work to have better and better choices as you go along.

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

I've not yet turned down anything that I later wished I had put out, if that's your meaning. There are plenty of great albums out there that would have made nice Foundry releases, but I never had the opportunity. There are a couple things right now that I might not get a shot at, and that would be a shame, but so far so good.

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

There are lots of things in development (some details follow below). I see a project like 360° or the upcoming SUB.TERRA as the kind of thing I'm interested in pursuing as a label... both collaborations of a kind, tied together in different ways, but bringing different styles together in service of one project. Mainly I just want to explore different ideas and approaches to music. I hope to find more ways to include graphics in projects as well, both live and in publishing.

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

SUB.TERRA

This is a full length CD featuring remixes/recyclings of Interstitial's epic "sub.terra" piece, a composition that blends ambient textures with adventuresome trumpet excursions into a truly unique hybrid sound. Contributors include vidnaObmana, Vir Unis, Saul Stokes, Michael Bentley (eM), and, of course, the inspirator Interstitial (John Koch-Northrup). The album will open with the original sub.terra track, followed by four reworkings. To bring this project full circle Interstitial will then create a final iteration by using elements from the remixed material.

EP SERIES

Somewhere between the single and the LP (long play) in length and scope, the EP allows ideas to be explored in some depth, but also benefits from a focus brought about by relative brevity. My feeling has been that this form is neglected both by sound artists and by listeners, and so The Foundry has been working with a variety of artists in order to present a series of EP releases, CDs somewhere between 15-30 minutes available at a reasonable price. The first in this series is Ben Swire's Equilibrium. Swire brings together beats, melodies and atmospheres to create an intoxicating travelogue. The detail in these compositions is remarkable, and I think that this release will appeal to anyone who has enjoyed Jonathan Hughes' Trillium CD, the output of City Centre Offices, Morr or even some of Susumu Yokota's work (Grinning Cat, Sakura). The next EP will be my own (as M. Bentley) Outward, an experimental excursion beginning where All the Stars Burning Bright left off and employing some different approaches. Other artists will be presented over the next year.

THING ASUNDER

This project, based around a cut-up story I put together, will feature contributions from Content Provider, myself and other artists working in the avant garde and experimental scene. The form is still developing and growing.

And of course there will be more of my own work, several rojects that have been taking shape over the last few years, including This World and A.D.

FOUNDRY DISCOGRAPHY (full length CDs unless otherwise noted)

FOU.01 **eM**..... *Djinn* (1997)
FOU.02 **VIA**..... *Ectelectronica*..... (1997)
FOU.03 **The Apiary** *Descent* (1997)

FOU.04	Rhomb	<i>Hidden Topographies</i>	(1998)
FOU.05	eM	<i>Greater than zero, less than one</i>	(1998)
FOU.06	The Foundry	<i>Mote</i>	(1999)
FOU.07	The Apiary	<i>A.D. Sketches (MP3s)</i>	(upcoming)
FOU.08	eM	<i>Motor Sessions EP (7")</i>	(1999)
FOU.09	eM	<i>Telecom (???)</i>	(???)
FOU.10	V/A	<i>Lost and Found (2 X CD)</i>	(2002)
FOU.11	Seofon et al	<i>Zero Point</i>	(2001)
FOU.12	Dean Santomieri	<i>The Boy Beneath the Sea</i>	(2001)
FOU.13	eM	<i>All the Stars Burning Bright</i>	(2001)
FOU.14	Mollusk	<i>Accretions</i>	(2001)
FOU.15	V/A	<i>360°</i>	(2002)
FOU.16	Jonathan Hughes	<i>Trillium</i>	(2002)
FOU.17	Ben Swire	<i>Equilibrium (CD EP series)</i>	(2002)
FOU.18	M. Bentley	<i>Outward (CD EP series)</i>	(upcoming)
FOU.19	V/A	<i>SUB.TERRA</i>	(upcoming)

ARCHIPELAGO/FOUNDRY *(issued separately and as a limited edition in a custom metal box)*

ARCH 3.1	Rhomb	<i>Lunatic (3" CD EP)</i>	(2000)
ARCH 3.2	CSERO	<i>Pikoliftor (3" CD EP)</i>	(2000)
ARCH 3.3	Seofon	<i>Immanent (3" CD EP)</i>	(2000)
ARCH 3.4	Thermal	<i>Span (3" CD EP)</i>	(2000)
ARCH 3.5	Dean Santomieri	<i>Crude Rotations (3" CD EP)</i>	(2000)
ARCH 3.6	eM	<i>Click Pop (3" CD EP)</i>	(2000)

NOTE – For your information, I have recorded as eM, The Apiary and Mollusk. Rhomb is myself with Nathan Kreisberg. - Michael

NON-FOUNDRY and MISCELLANIOUS APPEARANCES

EPs

- **eM** *Import* (3" CD) as part of the *invalidObject* series for FALLT [2000]
- **eM** *Retrograd* (cassette) for Slapart [2002] *upcoming*

COMPILATION APPEARANCES

- **Rhomb** the track *Lunatic Transit* for *Goldtri Volume 2* on STONKER [1998]
- **eM** the track *Gently Gigantic* for *Knots* on THOUSAND/WMO [1999]
- **eM** the track *On (minuet)* for the compilation accompanying the Fall 2000 issue of *Computer Music Journal* published by MIT PRESS [2000]
- **M. Bentley** the track *Dead Suns* on *ambient@hyperreal.01* on AQUAFM [2000]
- **eM** the track *Bertram's Room* for the *No Compression Festival* compilation on LITTLE FURY THINGS [2001]
- **eM** the track *Galaxies Like Grains of Sand* on *ambient@hyperreal.02* on AQUAFM [2001]
- **eM** the track *If on a Winter's Night (version)* on *Peace on Earth, Good Will to Men* on ZAFTIG RESEARCH [2001]
- **eM (with n.kra)** the track *Linoleum* on *The Freest of Radicals* on NO TYPE [2002]

MISCELLANEOUS + WEB-BASED

- **The Apiary** music for Charles Browning's installation *What are you afraid of?* THE FOUNDRY [1996]
- **The Apiary** music for Charles Browning's video *The Hunting of the Wren* THE FOUNDRY [1999]
- **eM** *Waiting* (an html based project with MP3s) for FALLT [2000]
- **eM** *Broken Moments* (an eight part suite of MP3s with graphics) for .TILN [2000]
- **Mollusk** www.mollusk.net (an ongoing series of internet released MP3s)
- **eM** music and images for the *Bertram's Room* video THE FOUNDRY [2001]
- **eM (with n.kra)** *Urban Renewal* (MP3s) on NO TYPE [2002?] *upcoming*