

U . C O V E R

U-COVER RECORDS - INC.US are two labels out of Belgium, and operated by **Koen Lybaert** and **Esther Santoyo**. Koen replied to our questions on **September 3, 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 on the 10th of April 1965. I was raised near Antwerp, Belgium and had a technical education until I was 17. After that I soon started working in bars and cafes and later on in a recordshop (for nine years) and now for a distribution company. Personally, I think I am a normal, honest, hard working person that likes to be creative after his working hours. I have a twelve year old son who lives with his mother and I am since the beginning of this year married with a beautiful, young and very intelligent Mexican woman.

- 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 ?

My advice is to be patient and release music that you and the people around you believe in. Start small and give it enough time to grow. First everyone needs to learn how and what a label means and starting with a tape-only or cdr-label could be a good idea. If you see it more as a kind of big business I guess you just need a lot of money and contacts to make it happen.

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

That's not complete true...my choice for the label and for my own music has to do more with my love for alternative and the more emotional side of music business. But not only unknown artists can find a place on the label. Acts like Lusine ICL and Electric Birds have proved their great taste of music before they released on U-cover or Inc.us.

To me it is about finding the kind of acts which are not less interesting as the ones I mentioned before.

Really good releases of Buddy System and Skipsapiens need much more time and effort to get some attention. Mostly there is some connection before I speak or mail

with the artist. The electronic scene is a very well connected scene. Things go around and when it feels there is a true connection then we start working out things concretely. The second U-cover release was made by Quench and they had a good contact with Lusine ICL. So things went very natural and relaxed. Esa Ruoho from Finland was a contact from our webmaster. With Electric Birds there was already a working relation because I distribute his label at Lowlands. Skipsapiens came in contact because of Atom Heart, and The Buddy System because he kind of knew Lusine ICL. Ten and Tracer was again a contact from Stijn, our webmaster. Besides Quench and Lusine ICL I haven't really met one of the artists. Now we are working out a Tim Koch full lenght and we will meet each other in November aswell as Ten and Tracer who will come over to make a tour later this year.

- **I have noticed in your list of distributors that in some countries you use some mailorder-lists 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.**
- **In other parts of the world your releases are sold in chains, is it good for your records to reach those music supermarkets ? What is best : keep things, prices under control and thus avoid mass-distribution in certain countries ? Or that records be available everywhere ?**

That's not a simple question. I guess as a label you are not always under control of what happens with your music. Supermarkets normally sell those releases who are wanted by a lot of people. If not they don't want to stock it. Supermarkets or chain stores are not that interested in alternative music. So if the label makes the choice of releasing music for a smaller audience they better work out a chain of their own contacts and spread the music through people, mailorder, shops and distributors that have an equal taste and ideas.

- **You also do a mailorder-list, does it generate benefits and help you to issue your records ?**
- **Koen you work for Lowlands, which is the most specialised distro for electro in your country. How is this helping you ? You also create music under the alias Starfish Pool so I guess you are closely connected to the music industry/scene. What is the situation for electronic music in Belgium ?**

Well, for us it is only possible to survive as a label if it's a hobby. So now Esther can spend the extra time it needs to run a mailordershop that we are slowly building up. First Stijn, our webmaster, made sure that our own releases were available by mailorder. Since a year ago Esther has made this her own job and it starts to give some result. At the moment we have on our webpage around 200 items from 40 labels.

My work at Lowlands is something to consider in a wider view. That's not just about my label, who is actually a very small part of my job. At Lowlands I don't make much of a difference between my own or an inhouse or a distributed label. Every release gets the attention it should need. As I told you U-cover is a small and independent

label and those who want to buy it, buy it. I mean, there is no pressure or pushing behind it and that counts for a lot of labels that Lowlands distribute. We make it available for those who want to buy this kind of music. We send weekly lists mentioning the new records and work out a basic promotion for distributors and shops. Besides that we deal with much serious and bigger labels that need a lot of work and attention and promotion but at the end of the day that makes sure that everyone gets a fee for their job. On the otherhand it's 8 years now that me and other people have been working out the label and we've done this for free. And indeed I have been active for 10 years as Starfish Pool (but last January I finally put an end to it) but I never felt connected to a Belgium scene. I guess the electronic scene is more an international scene.

- **Today, there are more and more chain stores and less and less passionate/smaller record shops. How are you affected by that (de)evolution ?**

That's a good reason to work out a good mailorder system. I guess this is going to evolve more and more, direct sales will become more important than before.

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

Well, I was 17 when I started to release music on a tape-only label. It was just fascinating to work out something like that. Now 20 years later it still feels as there is a long way to go before I reach what it should

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

Yeah, I think that from the start U-Cover had a real worked out concept. But we were also aware that there could be some changes with the time. Everything depends on sales and if you recover the money and have something extra to spend on artwork and things like that.

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

A typical U-cover act is cool, honestly focused in the music and pleased with what is going on. The name comes from Undercover, just an idea.

- **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 ?**

I always try to be myself as a person, an artist or as label. I don't think I have a favorite label that I try to copy. And I don't know if there is a label that sees U-cover as his influence. We barely survive so they shouldn't.

- **You pay a lot of attention to packaging – each of your record looking similar in a « u-cover » like a series - and your website is good-looking. Could you give us details on the person in charge of the design ?**

Bombthedot, Stefan Alt, Hymen, Ant zen !!! His is the man, master and brain behind the artwork. He created something incredible for us, something that completely fits and goes with our ideas. Besides that he is a good friend and nice person to work with.

- **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**

d) because they are right...because a lot of music is not made for a wide audience. The artists and labels have to accept that fact. The ones who are really good will not complain about lack of interest. Personally I always look out for the really good music, music that makes sense, have emotions. But of course everybody has a personal taste and like different styles, I am not that intersted in a global human behaviour.

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

There is a lot over here considering that it is a small city. More than 100 rock bands and more than 100 DJ's and electronica artists. There is also a lot of collaborative work. But it still doesn't feel like a scene or maybe there is and I am just someone standing on the side. I barely go out....

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

If I had the chance I would probably change my whole life but I don't look back that much and I am sort of pleased with my life right now. I don't regret much and in a way my life changes continuosly, so we'll see where and when it ends....

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

I am not sure, I am very pleased with the label so far.

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

We have planned a Tim Koch, Quench and Ontayso (my new musical project) remix album. The vinyl version of the compilation is on it's way. The Ten and Tracer cd is just out and we are planning a vinyl version.

With Ontayso I have another remix project with collaborations from Abstract Knights, Alejandra And Underwood, Arno Peeters, Bauri, Beta Bodega Coalition, Bloq, Break 3000, Cosmic Connection, Esa Ruoho, Greg Davis, Hrvatski, If Then Else, Kettel, Quench, Loess, Multiplex, Scanner, Sense, Signer, Skipsapiens, Ten And Tracer, The Buddy System, The Christian Science Minotaur Thuestad, Tim Koch, Ultra Milkmaids, File 538.

There are also plans to release split albums with Ontayso, Lusine ICL, Quench, Tim

Koch and Ten and Tracer.

www.u-cover.com

[u-cover001cd] STARFISH POOL Rituals For The Dying [04.1999]
[u-cover002cd] QUENCH A Journey Into Electronix [01.2000]
[u-cover003cd] LLIPS. VS STARFISH POOL Sweetwater [09.2000]
[u-cover004cd] LUSINE ICL A Pseudo Steady State [07.2000]
[u-cover005cd] ESA RUOHO Spaces [04.2001]
[u-cover006cd] LUSINE ICL Coalition 2000 [08.2001]
[u-cover007cd] LLIPS. Dos Parties [04.2001]
[u-cover008cd] THE BUDDY SYSTEM Application [08.2001]
[u-cover009cd] ELECTRIC BIRDS Strata Frames [09.2001]
[u-cover010cd] SKIPSAPIENS Skipsapiens [09.2001]
[u-cover011cd] V/A Perspective fragments volume One [05.2002]
[u-cover012cd] TEN AND TRACER An Hour Brighter [08.2002]

[inc.us001lp] LLIPS. Unalaska & The Valley Of 10.000 Smokes [03.2000]
[inc.us002lp] LLIPS. Smell [09.2000]
[inc.us003lp] LLIPS. The Brooklyn Attitude [02.2001]
[inc.us004lp] ELECTRIC BIRDS Strata [07.2001]
[inc.us005lp] ESA RUOHO Spaces [06.2001]
[inc.us006lp] TEN AND TRACER Keylemon Reports [12.2001]
[inc.us007lp] SIGNER Giving it up to feel effected [05.2002]
[inc.us008lp] LUSINE ICL Coalition 2000 [10.2001]
[inc.us009lp] ELECTRIC BIRDS Frames [04.2002]
[inc.us010lp] QUENCH O.M. - X.H. [04.2002]
[inc.us011lp] V/A Perspective fragments volume One * [...2002]

[lymph001lp] STARFISH POOL MEETS VA Lymph One [07.2000]
[lymph002lp] STARFISH POOL MEETS VA Lymph Two [09.2000]
[lymph003lp] STARFISH POOL MEETS VA Lymph Three [09.2000]
[lymph004lp] STARFISH POOL MEETS VA Lymph Four [11.2000]
[lymph005lp] STARFISH POOL MEETS VA Lymph Five [03.2001]
[lymph006lp] STARFISH POOL MEETS VA Lymph Six [09.2001]