



IMPORTANT RECORDS

Important Records. That's a hefty claim for a label to make, but one that they actually succeed in fulfilling. Started in 2001 by John Brien, it's already become synonymous with quality releases more than any actual sound or label aesthetic. With a healthy love for vinyl, artwork that drops jaws and exclusive releases, Important Records covers ground from the noise gutter to the prog heavens. Scott McKeating quizzed John on what makes the label tick...

Is Important a full time concern?

Important has been my primary occupation since day one so it's never actually been a bedroom operation. It started as online music retail and my goal all along was to turn it into a label. I'd been running one of the best record shops in New England and left the job to start Important. I have a teaching degree so I knew I wasn't going to make any money if I pursued that career. So, I didn't feel as if I was risking much to start Important.

Important seems to be thriving regard-

less of the increasing effects of downloads. Why do you think this is?

I'm not surprised that Important thrives in this era of downloads since serious music listeners tend to want more than just a digital download.

Boris' Vein is probably your best looking release - any plans to release anything as gorgeous again?

Vein did come out beautifully, didn't it? I've nearly recovered from that project and I can now hold one in my hand and not experience an increased heart rate. I was working about ten hours a week on that record for about six months and it was such a relief to finish it. We're currently working on a 4 LP Coil box set that will be equally as beautiful and fortunately has been a lot easier to manufacture. With Vein it was problem after problem. There wasn't an aspect of Vein that didn't require two or three tries to get right. The Coil box was a simple as sending the art/audio files out, thankfully.

How does the label select its releases? Do

you go to them or do they come to you?
It happens both ways.

How did you link up with Merzbow? The Merz titled releases seem to have really opened him up to new listeners.

I started communicating with Masami (Akita aka Merzbow) via email. I've realised over the years that the Merz series has initiated a lot of new listeners which I think is really fantastic. It was Merzbow, in part, that set me in a particular musical direction a long time ago.

Important has the rights to release Coil's final LP 'Ape On Naples'. How did this come about?

I'd been in touch with Jhonn Balance years back about working together and I never really followed up with it. After he died, when sufficient time had passed and Ape had been released on CD, I approached Peter with the idea and he was quite enthusiastic about it. It's going to be a fitting tribute to a great band and I couldn't possibly be more excited about it.

What do you regard as Important's definitive release?

I'm not sure that there's a definitive release since the thing I see as definitive for Important is a balance of quality and diversity. However, there is a release date in particular that I think of as being somewhat definitive. It was when we issued the first Beequeen and Larsen discs for Important. My wife had to go on a trip for business and I tagged along. I wrote the release information in a hotel room and while I was doing it I really started to feel like the label was gaining momentum. Besides the fact that they're both amazing records they also stick out as a turning point for Important.

Is there an ethos for the label?

There's no stated mantra or sound but there's certainly a direction and a philosophy. Perhaps the easiest way to understand the ethos of the label is to simply look at the records that have been released and they way they've been released. I release records I want to own.



HYPERJINX TRICYCLE
S/T (2002)

Folk outsider Daniel Johnston teams up with a few friends to do his thing with a bit more fidelity than usual. Even with the loss of his lo-fi charms, and songwriting input from his nutty mates, this is still as weirdly sweet as most Johnston solo releases. He's still the only man still able to perform a song about his love for an imaginary cartoon land and still sound sane...ish.



JOHN FAHEY
HITOMI (2002)

Legendary guitarist gets the vinyl treatment with a set of simple and beautiful guitar instrumentals. While Hitomi is most definitely Blues, it's without the usual sad-dling of genre junk. Fahey takes tiny left turns, minute improv passages that work so well it's difficult to spot them at all.



WOLF EYES
FUCK THE OLD MIAMI
(2005)

Another in Important's one-sided etched vinyls, this time the flipside's 'playable' etching threatening to wreck the stylus. Mellow in comparison to much of their own discography, Wolf Eyes still dug in harsher than everyone else. With scratchy sax and barbarous blow-outs forming a crow swarm, this trio made creepy sound like GBH.



HOTOTOGISU
GHOSTS FROM THE SUN
(2005)

Turning buildings to salt and then flushing it all away with boiling glitter, Hototogisu (aka Matthew Bower and Marcia Bassett) rage in wordless exaltation. One huge unconscious homage to a hydrogen star spread across two discs, if only they'd found a way to keep it as a whole. A layered ritual that rarely looks up from its altar, this is an excellent starting point for the duo.



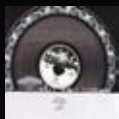
OCEAN
HERE WHERE NOTHING
GROWS
(2005)

Doom from Maine, a heavy whale-trawling quartet that pushed low end to its knees. Grindingly slow and longer than your average crushing session, Ocean deserved to shunt their way to the front of the up-and-comers queue. More grief and dejection than smoked-out repetition, the follow up is needed soon.



MERZBOW
MERZBUTA (2005)

The residents of Animal Farm move into the cities, burning department stores and slaughtering meat eaters as they go. Merzbow taps the hitherto unexplored part of his brain that controls the ability to create shit-hot and heavy beats; this is the peak of his outstanding Important release series. Not just noise!



BORIS
VEIN
(2006)

Seen by some as more a work of art than an actual album release, Vein's packaging inspired both towering rants and unequalled praise. The music more than matched the cover, Boris amping up their loud side. These two cuts of endlessly reconstituting rock noise took Boris down their heaviest, messiest route to date.



**FLAHERTY/CORSANO/
YEH**
SLOW BLIND AVALANCHE
(2006)

Glorious vinyl-only release for this heavy noise godz team-up, who chose a more aggressive sound here than they did for the companion CD (Rock In The Snow). Spencer Yeh's throat and violin explorations are a great addition to the familiar but still reality-shaking Flaherty / Corsano pairing, this is as noisejazz as it gets.



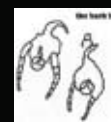
**KEIJI HAINO & SITAR
TAH**
AMINAMINA
(2006)

A double disc set of gorgeous density from the always dependable Haino backed by a twenty-strong Sitar orchestra. With the first disc the spotlight is centred on the tiny changes that the players make, the nuances are brought to the fore. The second disc is more like a hand grenade going off onstage, for those who prefer buffeted by hurricanes to cool breezes across glistening warm waves.



**A PLACE TO BURY
STRANGERS**
S/T (2007)

Stark black and white noise-infected rock and roll, but with a bloody bubble flecked halo. Their self-titled debut is so heavily indebted to the 1982 line-up of The Cure that Robert Smith should be able to get himself a new pool. Despite this album's commerciality, it's an album that the mainstream could only have accepted once Wolf Eyes had kicked the doors in.



THE BARK HAZE
TOTAL JOKE ERA (2007)

Gown's Andrew MacGregor teams up with Thurston Moore to create big ol' slabs of beautiful dissonant music together. This two-track improvised guitar album is revelatory in the fact that McGregor and Moore are indistinguishable, there's no fallback position for the SY man. The pair moves in and out of each other as if they lacked corporeal form, effortlessly delicious playing throughout.



SMEGMA
33 1/3
(2007)

The most peculiar and underrated improv group ever, looking more like vegan bounty hunters who've stumbled out of a mare's nest than a collective of free-players. With completely heretical structures, instrumentation and moves this collective blow all-comers away with sheer ingenuousness of mind. With the entire group missing the part of the brain that recognises genre distinction, this is an album that's always going to pay out.

WORDS: SCOTT MCKEATING