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## Head of A&R at Putumayo to Start New World Music Label Cumbancha Crosses Cultures for Inspiration

"I believe exposure to music from different parts of the world can help open a doorway to other cultures," insists Ethnomusicologist and record producer **Jacob Edgar**. "Listening to music is an excellent way to make a connection with people who are very different from yourself, and it can create a common ground that overcomes some of the barriers that separate people of different walks of life."

This goal of bringing people together through music is just one of the inspirations behind Edgar's newly launched **Cumbancha**, a record label whose mission is to bring some of the world's most exciting music to a wider audience.

"My experience at Putumayo has taught me that world music is much more popular than is generally recognized," notes Edgar, who for the last seven years has been Vice President of Artists and Repertoire at **Putumayo World Music**, one of the most ubiquitous and successful independent record labels. "People from all generations and backgrounds are looking for music with roots in cultural traditions, even if that music isn't as visible as it should be in the mainstream media."

Edgar is a global explorer with an insatiable curiosity for the diverse ways in which people express themselves through music. His research trips in search of music for Putumayo's compilations have taken him to Cuba, Brazil, Turkey, India and dozens of other countries, not to mention hundreds of the world's greatest international music festivals, showcases and performance venues in search of exceptional musical talents.

Edgar has helped produce compilation CDs that have sold a total of over ten million units worldwide. Always scouring the planet for new sounds, he possibly listens to more world music CDs than anyone else in the USA and, possibly, the world. "My basic role at Putumayo has been to travel the world and dig up as much music as I could, then review it to uncover those truly great artists and songs that rise above, and that would appeal to both fans of world music and neophytes who are just interested in hearing something they like. I often tell people, 'I suffer so you don't have to!' What I mean is I have to listen to a lot of pretty banal stuff to find those musical diamonds, but as a result I've gotten to know some pretty special artists and musical movements."

The main motivation for Cumbancha sprung from Edgar's desire to work more closely with some of the most extraordinary artists he has gotten to know over the years. "We used to say at Putumayo that doing compilations was like dating, and signing artists was like getting married," says Edgar. "After years of flirting with some of my favorite artists, it's nice to finally make some commitments and settle down!"

Shortly after notifying Putumayo last fall of his intentions to leave the label strike out on his own, Edgar's former employer offered to become an investor in his new project and service his releases through Putumayo's network of worldwide distribution. The relationship allows Edgar to continue to assist Putumayo in the development of their popular compilations, while giving Cumbancha releases a powerful presence in over 60 countries around the world.

"Many of the artists who will appear on Cumbancha have been on a Putumayo compilation over the years," notes Edgar, "so in some ways this new label offers an opportunity for people who have become intrigued by artists on Putumayo's collections to explore their work further." At the same time, Cumbancha will present many artists whose work falls outside of the aesthetic boundaries of a Putumayo compilation, but whose work is particularly compelling or innovative.

Cumbancha's first release in the United States, Canada and Latin America was the album *¡Ay Caramba!* by the UK-based band Ska Cubano, whose appealing fusion of Jamaican ska with Cuban mambo, salsa and son has earned them wide praise and accolades across Europe. Yet, even though the group has played at some of Europe's most prestigious festivals and concert halls, won numerous "Best of" awards from dozens of magazines, and even caused a stodgy audience of tuxedo-clad diplomats to bounce in their seats at last year's Nobel Peace Prize Award ceremony, Ska Cubano remained largely unknown among the broader public outside of Europe. Since their album was released



in the United States they embarked on a hugely successful US and Canada tour, playing in hi-profile venues such as Central Park SummerStage, Montreal International Jazz Festival, San Francisco's Stern Grove and Grand Performances in Los Angeles among others. Praised by both the media and the public, Ska Cubano's album hit # 5 on the Billboard World Music Charts and #1 on the College Music Journal's World Music radio chart, marking an auspicious beginning for the new Cumbancha label.

The first worldwide release by Cumbancha is the Israeli cross-cultural collaborative, **The Idan Raichel Project**, whose appealing fusion of Ethiopian folk music with Middle Eastern flavors have made them one of the most unexpected success stories in Israeli music today. While recent headlines are dominated by news of conflict and war in the Middle East, this Israeli musical collaborative has achieved success by looking beyond intercultural differences and celebrating the value of diversity. With its blend of traditional Ethiopian folk music, Arabic poetry, Yemenite chants, Biblical psalms and Caribbean rhythms, **The Idan Raichel Project** has already taken Israel by storm with multiple number one hits and triple platinum sales.

While the ensemble regularly fills large concert halls at home, the upcoming international release of the recordings of *The Idan Raichel Project* on the **Cumbancha** record label promises to introduce the work of this inspirational collective to a wide global audience. "The Idan Raichel Project are already superstars in Israel and Israeli and Ethiopian communities worldwide," says Edgar, "They have performed in some of the most prestigious venues in Europe, the United States and Latin America, yet almost exclusively to Israeli audiences. Cumbancha's goal is to expose them to a wider public who will also enjoy this unique artist." The Idan Raichel Project will be embarking on an ambitious worldwide touring schedule in an effort to introduce their music to a new public.

On February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2007, Cumbancha will release the album *Wátina* by **Andy Palacio and the Garifuna Collective**. Featuring soul-stirring melodies and vibrant grooves from the Garifuna community of Central America that unite the musical legacies of Africa and the Caribbean, *Wátina* creates a powerful saga of exile, longing, hope and celebration. Years in the making, the album is infused with contemporary influences, yet firmly rooted in the rich musical traditions of this unique and inspiring culture. Belizean icon, Andy Palacio, leads an all-star, multi-generational lineup to deliver a monumental tribute to the Garifuna of yesterday and tomorrow.

The headquarters for Cumbancha is an 1830's farmhouse in the small town of Charlotte, Vermont. Also home to one of New England's most prestigious recording studios, Charles Eller Studios ([www.charlesellerstudios.com](http://www.charlesellerstudios.com)), the complex in Vermont will allow for a unique artist retreat where musicians from around the world can come together to record in a picturesque and tranquil setting free from outside distractions. While many of the records released on Cumbancha will be recorded on location in the countries where the music is from, others will be recorded in this special setting. Most of the post-production work will be completed in Vermont, in the shadows of the verdant Green Mountains. "I spend so much time traveling around the world," says Edgar, "it's nice to work in a place where I can focus and be surrounded by the region's tremendous natural beauty."

"One of the things I always enjoyed most about the work I did at Putumayo," says Edgar, "was knowing that thousands of people were exposed to music from cultures they might not otherwise get to learn about, and in a small but not inconsequential way helped pave the way towards greater appreciation and respect for diversity." Cumbancha gives Edgar a chance to take that experience one step further.

"Cumbancha" is a Cuban word of West African derivation that refers to an impromptu party or musical jam session. Many classic Latin songs refer to the "cumbanchero," a person who knows how to party and have a good time. For those who are familiar with the word, "cumbancha" implies an opportunity to get together with family and friends to dance, sing and celebrate life. "I like the creole nature of the word," says Edgar, "that it is a blend of African and Spanish. Much of the greatest music in the world reflects this interaction between cultures and the ways in which people can gain inspiration for new expressions from people of different backgrounds."

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