

"I see music as a tool for introducing people to other cultures." **Jacob Edgar**



Photos by **GLENN RUSSELL**, Free Press

Jacob Edgar is a music researcher for the Putamayo World Music label. He works out of a newly refurbished barn in Charlotte. BELOW: CDs of some of the label's artists.

Bringing world music to Vt.

Music researcher moved to Charlotte to start record label

By **Brent Hallenbeck**
Free Press Staff Writer

CHARLOTTE — Jacob Edgar has been all over the world, traveling to 30 countries in search of new acts for the Putamayo World Music label.

When it came time to leave New York City and start his own music label, Cumbancha, Edgar didn't settle in Brazil or some other adventurous spot he's frequented. He returned to his simple, bucolic roots in his home state, Vermont, in one of the most rural settings you can find in Chittenden County.

The Plainfield native moved last year with his wife and two daughters to the home adjacent to Charles Eller Studios, which is one of Vermont's most prominent recording sites. Edgar learned through a mutual friend that Eller was looking to sell his Charlotte home; for Edgar, who was looking to remove his family from the hubbub of the city, start a record label and dive deeper into the world of record producing, the thought of buying Eller's farmhouse was too serendipitous to pass up.

"The gears started to turn in our heads: 'This is an amazing synchronicity that we should take advantage of,'" Edgar, 38, said in a recent interview.

Along with his continued work for Putamayo and his new project with Cumbancha, Edgar has taken on another

task: He's organizing a series of world-music concerts at Higher Ground, starting with a show tonight at the South Burlington nightclub featuring Andy Palacio, a native of Belize, and his group the Garifuna Collective, whose album "Watina" recently came out on the Cumbancha label. The concert series represents the latest step in Edgar's ironic effort to bring world music to more of the world.

Edgar traces his awareness of world music back to his childhood, when his father, the late George Konhoff, was a performing artist with the Bread and Puppet Theater (Edgar comes from a creative family; his mother, Kileh Friedman, was a potter and art teacher who's now a therapist in Burlington). Edgar recalls that Bread and Puppet regularly brought in Latin American musicians for its performances. As he grew older, Edgar frequented world-music shows at Club Metronome in Burlington.

World music seeped into his studies at Oberlin College in Ohio, where his studies included tracing the history of Trinidad through calypso lyrics. He also played trumpet in a salsa band while at Oberlin.

His lifelong interest in world music led to his job with Putamayo as the head of A&R (artists and repertoire), with



If you go

- **WHAT:** Andy Palacio and the Garifuna Collective
- **WHEN:** 8:30 tonight
- **WHERE:** Higher Ground Showcase Lounge, South Burlington
- **TICKETS:** \$12
- **INFORMATION:** 652-0777, www.highergroundmusic.com

the job of searching for acts to present on the label. He recently moved an old barn from Jericho to his Charlotte property — "Over time this label is going to grow, so I needed space to hire more people," he said — and part of that new office space will be devoted to his CD archive that contains thousands of demo recordings Edgar has encountered in his search for world-music artists.

Not all of those recordings

deserve to be heard outside of Edgar's ears. "I'm constantly with headphones on," he said. "My motto is, 'I suffer so you don't have to.'"

Edgar's travels have turned up a lot of great music, too. He talks fondly of Brazil, Cuba and Mali, places where music is woven into the fabric of daily life, where people sing and dance regardless of their level of expertise, where local music born in the 1940s is just as hip for teens as the latest pop sound. Those are qualities we've lost in the United States, Edgar said.

His travels on behalf of Putamayo put him in the care of local music contacts who whisk him to concerts, recording studios and record shops, giving him access to out-of-the-way places the average international tourist doesn't see. "It's just a joyful, really great way to travel," he said.

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WORLD: Higher Ground hosting concert series

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Though he moved from the melting pot of New York City to sparsely populated Vermont, Edgar still feels connected to world music thanks to the Internet and direct flights from Burlington to New York. "I don't feel isolated at all," he said. "I feel like I'm living in this special retreat, but I have access to the whole world."

Edgar still works with Putumayo, which invested in his new label. Putumayo is dedicated primarily to compiling music that's already been recorded, while Edgar is gearing Cumbancha — it's a Cuban word of West African origin referring to an impromptu party or jam session — toward new recordings. He's already introducing Vermont to the world and vice-versa: Edgar has hosted several world musicians at his Charlotte property, including renowned guitarist/vocalist Habib Koite of Mali, who recorded his upcoming album "Afriki" in the fall at Charles Eller Studios.

Koite played for more than 1,000 listeners at the Flynn Center in 2003, but Edgar said it can be hard to draw similar crowds for world-music acts. That's

why he's putting his know-how to work for the world-music concert series at Higher Ground.

Alex Crothers, co-owner of Higher Ground, said reggae music is consistently strong at the club. "World music, beyond that, we've always frankly struggled with," he said.

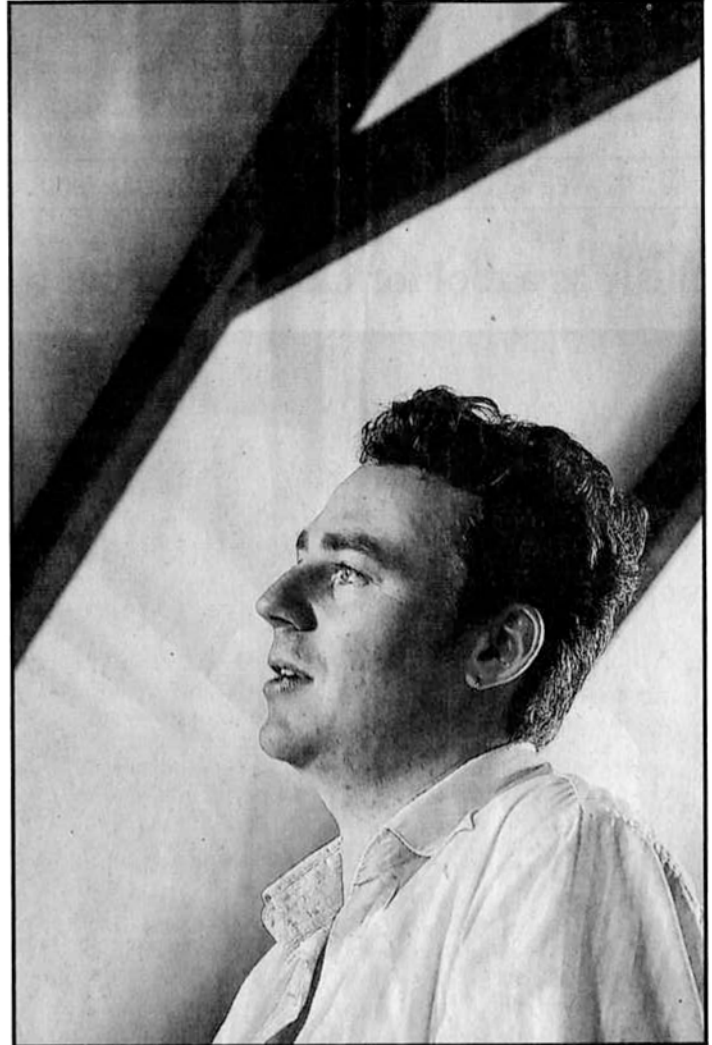
Edgar came to Higher Ground with the offer of promoting a world-music concert series, and Crothers said Edgar can help draw bigger crowds for the shows by "shaking the tree" to attract those fans of world music who are out there.

"We're certainly willing to give it a try because it's a nice addition to the programming we're already doing, and we're fans of world music," Crothers said.

To Edgar, world music is one part fun, one part illumination.

"I see music as a tool for introducing people to other cultures," Edgar said. "That's the grand motivation, that music will help people develop a more global perspective."

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