

In search of the lost chords of undiscovered talents

TERRI DUNBAR-CURRAN

THE OPPORTUNITY to travel the globe looking for new and exciting musicians and sounds would be any world music lover's idea of bliss – for Jacob Edgar it's all that and so much more.

The ethnomusicologist and music producer has worked with independent record label Putumayo World Music for almost 10 years.

He spent his working days travelling the world looking for musicians and songs to include on the label's compilations.

As he explored, he met artists he thought would benefit from wider recognition.

"I kept getting to know new musicians and producers I felt had really special talent. I wanted to be more involved with them than just the compilations," he says.

And so the idea for his label, Cumbancha, was born.

That was three years ago, and when he told Putumayo of his plans, the label liked the idea so much that a unique partnership was started.

Edgar would continue to scout for new artists for Putumayo and at the same time would select those he felt he would like to take further.

"It is a nice symbiotic partnership," he explains.

Putumayo brings attention to the new artists and Cumbancha helps them expand into careers and take their music further. Edgar also finds he has a little more flexibility and room for experimentation with Cumbancha.

"I've discovered some exceptional music from around the world that I consider universal – the type of music and songs I feel confident anyone will enjoy and connect with, regardless of language.

"The example I use is someone like Bob Marley. He created a universal sound and appeal. You could say Cumbancha is on the hunt for the next Bob Marley."

The label has a range of new talent signed and Edgar is hesitant to single out any one act.

"It's like when you have children," he laughs. "You try not to make any of them stand out more than the others."

That said, Edgar did mention a group with whom he had recently worked – Rupa and the April Fishes, a multicultural San Francisco group.



MUSIC MAN: Jacob Edgar travels the world looking for new musicians to sign to the Cumbancha label.

"Rupa Marya spends half her time as a musician and the other half as a doctor. It's very intimidating working with an artist who is cleverer than you are."

The group's music has French chanson, gypsy swing, tango, Latin alternative and Indian influences.

"They are really all over the map. But they have managed to find a young crossover audience. They have created a new type of international music."

Edgar says it is quite difficult to find music that can be considered really "pure" these days.

Everything is influenced by everything else. There is a wealth of upcoming talent to be discovered across the globe, and there are a number of groups with whom Edgar is working.

"I have a bunch of really exciting artists working on albums right now. People like Kailash Kher, a very big 'pop' star in India. His

music has a lot of traditional as well as contemporary flavours. He has an incredibly powerful and beautiful voice."

Kher is to release an album with Cumbancha in September.

Edgar has also been working with the Sierra Leone Refugee All Stars.

"The group were formed in a refugee camp. They just started jamming together and started the band."

A film, *The Refugee All Stars*, was made in 2005 and the group have appeared on the *Oprah Winfrey Show* and performed alongside Aerosmith, Keith Richards, and others. They are to release their second album, with Cumbancha, at the beginning of next year.

While Edgar does a lot of travelling, his discovery of new music is not limited to those international trips. He devotes a great amount of time to attending festivals and

industry-related conferences and events, as well as scouring the internet, magazines and radio stations. Also, a lot of people contact him.

"If you saw what came in the mail it would blow your mind. I have a really huge CD collection and a huge stamp collection."

With all the mail he gets from around the world, Edgar makes a point of collecting all the unusual stamps for his daughter.

For every musician or group ready to take the next step and sign with Cumbancha, there are many others still on their way up, so Edgar has founded the Cumbancha Discovery Series.

"It gives me the opportunity to sign the artists I might not normally sign because they're in an early stage of their careers.

"They usually have no managers or backing agents yet. It's a chicken and egg problem. They can't get any of those things if they don't have a

record, and they can't make a record without those things."

Edgar teams up with the artists and shares in the investment and resultant revenue.

"We share in the benefits and the success. Hopefully (the CDs) will introduce them to the international market.

"It's obviously still a lot of work, but I'm as excited about those as any other Cumbancha release."

Even with the extra commitments, Edgar feels he is travelling more than before.

Luckily he has a very strong team behind him and support all over the world that enables him to get out there, find new musicians and focus on the creative side of business.

"I've also become involved in an exciting new National Geographic programme called *Music Nomad*, where I travel around the world looking for great music and eating great food."

No different from what he has spent his time doing before?

"Yes, I can roll three things into one now."

Edgar has travelled to many exotic places and says that South Africa is at the top of his list of places he would like to visit.

"I love South African music. If you look at the world there are countries that are musical hot pots, where new things are created constantly – like Brazil and Cuba.

"The history of South African music is really incredible. I'm sure there's a lot of stuff I haven't even heard of yet."

With all his trips, Edgar is almost ashamed to admit he has yet to visit Africa.

But he says that through his work with African artists based in the US and Europe, he has many open invitations to visit the continent, invitations he hopes to take up soon.

Edgar has another interesting hobby that has nothing to do with music.

For the past five years, he has been collecting toothpaste and tooth powder from around the world. He has collected about 100 items and says he makes a point of popping into the chemist at every remote location he finds himself in on his travels.

● See www.cumbancha.com, or www.putumayo.com



THE DUCHESS: Keira Knightley

Not just a pretty costume drama

★★★★ THE DUCHESS. Directed by Saul Dibb, with Keira Knightley, Ralph Fiennes, Charlotte Rampling, Dominic Cooper and Hayley Atwell.

THIS entertaining period drama doesn't shy away from drawing parallels between its protagonist, the Duchess of Devonshire, Georgiana Spencer (Keira Knightley) and her descendent, Princess Diana.

Stuck in a loveless marriage to William Cavendish (Ralph Fiennes), one of the most powerful men in 18th century England, Georgiana becomes determined to be a player in the affairs of the world, out-gambling, out-drinking and outwitting many of the aristocratic men who surrounded her.

Her growing interest in politics, and in finding love, lead to all man-

ner of complications; some melodramatic and soap opera-ish, but strong performances, especially from Fiennes, who brings a subtlety and depth to a role that could easily have been played as a cardboard cut-out villain, elevate this engrossing film beyond a pretty costume drama. – Dennis Cavernelis

★★★ TWILIGHT. Directed by Catherine Hardwicke, with Kristen Stewart, Robert Pattinson, Billy Burke, Peter Facinelli and Cam Gigandet.

The first of a series of adaptations of Stephenie Meyer's crazily popular *Twilight* novels has already proved insanely popular with fans of the books and the film has, in turn, spawned legions of new followers, thanks largely to the brood-

ing allure of leading man Robert Pattinson.

If you don't know the story by now, it's safe to say you're probably not overly interested in beautiful vampire boys (who don't subscribe to that messy business of stalking and drinking the blood of hapless humans) and the sad-eyed girls with whom they fall in love.

For those who are interested, *Twilight* is rock-solid adaptation and while some of the visual effects are a little ropy, this movie is not about flashy effects or gore (the bloodier horror elements occur off-screen) or action (although there is a dash of that involving old school vampires taking on their more progressive counterparts), it's an old-fashioned love story and a rather sweet one too. – DC

★★ ELEGY. Directed by Isabel Coixet, with Ben Kingsley, Penelope Cruz, Patricia Clarkson, Dennis Hopper and Peter Sarsgaard.

Ostensibly the story of an unlikely May-December romance which develops between a university professor and acclaimed author David Keppesh (Kingsley) and a former student some 30-odd years his junior, Consuela Castillo (Cruz), this adaptation of Philip Roth's caustic novel is a rather flat, lifeless affair.

The lively supporting cast, especially Dennis Hopper as Keppesh's best friend, and Patricia Clarkson as Keppesh's long-time no-strings-attached lover, add some zest to an otherwise bland adaptation that fails to engage the audience. – DC