

Record Label of the Issue Cumbancha



Jacob Edgar, enterprising founder of one of the freshest labels on the scene, talks to *Songlines* about setting up on his own and looking forward to the future



Jacob Edgar

The Cumbancha label is three years old this April – a relative fledgling amongst other veteran world music labels – yet it has already firmly established itself as a leader in its field. This is largely due to the fact that the label's

founder, Jacob Edgar, is definitely no world music novice, having been the head of A&R at Putumayo for eight years, before deciding to set up his own label. "I got bored doing only compilations all the time," Edgar confesses. "I also wanted to have more of my own creative control."

Edgar studied ethnomusicology and wrote his Masters on Cuban music, which is where the name for his new label originates from. "I wanted a name that had some kind of music connection but wasn't necessarily a word that people would recognise immediately," he says. "A *cumbanchero* is somebody who is basically a party animal and *cumbancha* is an impromptu musical party."

With already ten releases in the catalogue, featuring a range of artists from Afro-Peruvians Novalima, Zimbabwean singer Chiwoniso to Umalali, the Garifuna women's project, the label seems to be thriving. In addition to choosing artists with wide appeal, another important factor which influences Edgar's decision in signing an artist is the story behind the music: "I've always focused a lot on the story behind the artists that I've worked with – they all have pretty interesting stories." This

was undoubtedly the case with Belizean Garifuna singer Andy Palacio, whose album *Wátina* was released in 2007. "It really did get a tremendous response," Edgar says. "I knew the record was stratospherically good; my concern was whether we'd be able to convince other people, coming from a small, new label." They certainly did a good job of persuading others, as Palacio posthumously won a Radio 3 Award for World Music.

Edgar's endless quest in search of new music has recently taken him to India where he's filming – and hosting – the first episodes of a new music and travel TV series. So, as well as immersing himself in all things Indian – from playing cricket, learning how to cook local food and even visiting a Delhi barber – Edgar is discovering lots of new Indian musical talent. Watch this space for acts from the sub-continent appearing on the label sometime soon.

Edgar is still a consultant for Putumayo and gets sent "hundreds and hundreds" of demos every month. "I think I probably get more music sent to me than anybody else in the world, maybe even more than *Songlines!*" he adds. "That was my motto at Putumayo – 'I suffer so you don't have to!'"

The rapidly changing nature of the music industry means Cumbancha is looking at new business models and has come up with a new line called Discovery, to be launched this summer. Edgar sees this as a way of releasing some of the excellent projects that cross his desk from artists who don't yet have an infrastructure in place to

support their talent. It's a bit like a chicken and an egg scenario for many musicians: "They can't get an agent or manager unless they have a record out. So I'm trying out a new business model in which the artist and the label share the costs of producing and marketing a new album and also share the profits equally." He hopes this new approach will be a way to kick-start an artist's career, but with less up front risk. While the albums on the Cumbancha Discovery series will be released in physical format, the emphasis will be on using new technology to market, promote and sell.

"The challenge now is that there are decreasing outlets to sell music; I don't think people are any less interested in music, there are just fewer places for people to casually stumble upon something," he says. "The internet has helped tremendously and will continue to help. Will it ever replace browsing through a record store? I don't know."

However, Cumbancha is determined to look forward and embrace all tools the internet has to offer: utilising social networking sites, advertising on Facebook and promoting digital downloads. The label is also focusing on expanding the ways in which it generates revenue, through licensing, direct-to-consumer sales, music publishing and merchandising. "The future for music companies lies in diversity," Edgar says about the changes in the music industry. "But I also believe that if you focus on releases of truly exceptional quality, you will achieve success in the long run." ■

2009

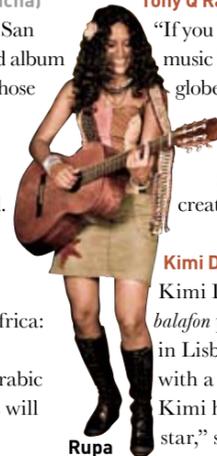
Forthcoming releases

Rupa & The April Fishes (on Cumbancha)

The polyglot musical subversives from San Francisco will be releasing their second album this autumn. Recorded by Oz Fritz, whose credits include Tom Waits, the new album will feature boundary-crossing songs about love, death and breaking down borders, both real and imagined.

Tony Q Rastafara (on Cumbancha Discovery)

"If you want proof that Bob Marley and reggae music has reached the farthest reaches of the globe, look no further than Indonesian reggae star Tony Q Rastafara," Edgar says of his new signing. "He has a unique, gruff voice and a deep commitment to creating his own style of reggae."



Rupa

Sarazino (on Cumbancha Discovery)

The leader of Sarazino is Lamine Fella, an Algerian raised in West Africa: "Sarazino's appealing music blends elements of reggae, Latin grooves, Arabic and African music. Manu Chao fans will love this group."

Kimi Djabaté (on Cumbancha Discovery)

Kimi Djabaté is a guitarist, percussionist and *balafon* player from Guinea-Bissau who lives in Lisbon. His sound is acoustic and melodic with a bit of an Afro-Latin swing. "I think Kimi has the potential to be an African music star," says Edgar.

Live dates for the diary

14 MAY The Idan Raichel Project play at Le Bataclan in Paris

22 JULY Chiwoniso plays at Radio France Montpellier Festival

05 JULY Novalima play at Roskilde Festival, Denmark

31 JULY Rupa & The April Fishes play at Cambridge Folk Festival

What the press have said

'The genre's new champion'
The Chicago Sun-Times

'Cumbancha has established itself as not only one of the finest world music record labels in this country [the US], but one of the finest record labels, period. Five-star record after five-star record... at this point I'm starting to think I might buy mayonnaise if Cumbancha slapped their approval on it'
About.com

Songlines podcast & interactive sampler

Listen to an excerpt of Umalali's 'Hattie' from their *Songlines Music Awards* nominated album *The Garifuna Women's Project* on this issue's podcast.

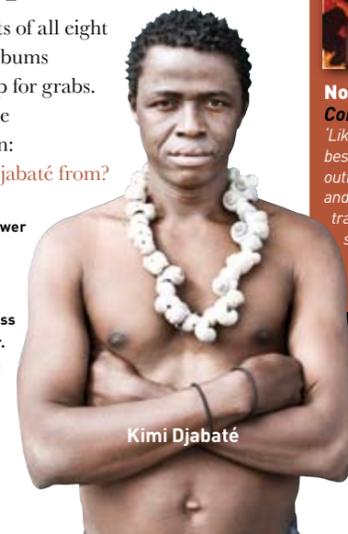
Listen to an excerpt of The Idan Raichel Project's 'Ódjus Fixadu', featuring Mayra Andrade, on this issue's interactive sampler.

Win! Competition

We have three sets of all eight back catalogue albums (pictured right) up for grabs. Simply answer the following question:

Where is Kimi Djabaté from?

Post or email your answer with 'Cumbancha Competition' in the subject line, together with your name, address and telephone number. See p5 for competition rules and address details. Closing date June 26 2009



Kimi Djabaté

Songlines guide to the Best of the catalogue



The Idan Raichel Project
The Idan Raichel Project

'Mixes Ethiopian folk music with Israel's multicultural sounds on hymns and intimate love songs. An ambient world music crossover masterpiece' *Rough Guide*



Andy Palacio
Wátina

'As revelatory as Paul Simon's *Graceland* or the Buena Vista Social Club, *Wátina* – with its sunset palette – could just be the dawn of a new day for the Garifuna's overlooked culture' *Newsday*



Habib Koité
Afriki

'Listening to this album is like having an old friend come to visit, full of great tales and smiles. A slice of heaven wanting to be owned' *Songlines*



Umalali
The Garifuna Women's Project

A unique and wonderful world; once you enter, you will never want to leave. Surely, this is how Amy Winehouse wishes she could sound' *Charlie Gillett, The Observer*



Rupa & The April Fishes
eXtraOrdinary rendition

'Rupa & The April Fishes – with their multicultural, multilingual, ultra-accessible music – ought to be the new USA's flagship band' *ROOTS*



Chiwoniso
Rebel Woman

'An exhilarating new voice on the Afro-pop scene. Evokes Marley at his best' *Village Voice*



Novalima
Coba Coba

'Like Gotan Project at their best, this Afro-Peruvian outfit take the rhythmic and melodic forms of its traditional music and make something wholly vital and contemporary out of them' *The Independent*



The Idan Raichel Project
Within My Walls

'This one-man Middle East peace accord makes music that is an ambitious celebration of multicultural diversity. Thrillingly bridges the traditional and the modern' *The Times*

8 FREE TRACKS!

To get a free track download from each of the eight 'Best of' releases, go to: www.cumbancha.com/songlines