

# LABEL OF LOVE

## Bristol Archive

Provincial punks pogo local

**Q&A** Founder Mike Darby

## BRISTOL ARCHIVE RECORDS



### Why start a label?

Having been in a band in 1980 and managing acts throughout the mid-80s, a label seemed the natural progression. I've run the Sugar Shack imprint since 1985, primarily concentrating on new rock music. Bristol Archive is a subsidiary of that. We aim to showcase music from Bristol's diverse scene and provide a historical document for all things Bristolian.

### When and how did it start?

In 2001, when we released *Western Stars: The Bands That Built Bristol* on CD, which featured acts from 1978-81. That record didn't sell very well, so there was no follow up until a friend of mine, Vice Squad's guitarist Dave Bateman, died two years ago. Bristol is quite rightly known for the success of Massive Attack, Portishead, Tricky, Smith & Mighty and Roni Size, but I thought that there ought to be a library documenting those that support the local music scene at its roots. If you live in Bristol you'll know that there's a giant web of people who were in bands throughout the post-punk period, and many are still very active.

### Was it a financial struggle?

Running a record label is a labour of love; you only ever make money if you get very lucky. It's always been a drain on the finances and there's no sign that this will change. Fortunately, I have a great team working with me, which means that we've kept costs to a minimum.

### What labels influenced you?

Heartbeat, Wavelength, Recreational, Shoc Wave, Fried Egg, Nubian and Black Roots.

### Who are your competitors?

We don't have any as we're unique. There can't be another city in the world reissuing its entire back catalogue with the support of the artists and the original label owners.

### Why the name?

Obviously the label's about archive material which comes from Bristol – or the immediate surrounding areas, such as Bath and Cheltenham.

### What's your guiding principle?

It's all about history. Yes, the music is vitally important, but it's about the people as much as the songs. You'll find stories in the People/Fanzines

section of our website from individuals that weren't in bands but were part of the scene. There are also downloadable PDFs of fanzines.

### Can you sum up your output?

Three CD releases to date: *Western Stars: The Bands That Built Bristol*, *The Best Of Fried Egg Records (Bristol 1979-80)* and *Bristol: The Punk Explosion*. New CDs in production include *Avon Calling 2* and the best of the Heartbeat, Bristol Recorder and Wavelength labels. We've also put out 155 digital releases in two years and have a limited edition vinyl from The Cortinas, Mk I (reviewed this month on page 82). Without them, the label wouldn't have had the kick-start it needed. I'm indebted to the band and Nick Sheppard in particular.

### How do you find new acts?

We should be talking about finding old ones, but through word of mouth and via friends of friends. I've got a reasonable memory; lots of detective work tracking people down, asking them to look in the loft or under their bed for recordings they made 30 years ago. Virtually everyone is thrilled that I'm interested, they're incredibly positive and want to be part of the archive.

### How important is the look and packaging of your records?

Not that important, as most are digital-only, so there's only ever a front sleeve. With the CDs and vinyl it's a different ball game, as we've tried to maintain a look and feel from the time, using old images, pictures, posters, etc. Recently, we've got Sam Giles on board, who's a brilliant designer.

### What are your future plans for expanding the label?

Alongside more vinyl releases and an ever-expanding website, we have a series of books in the pipeline, in partnership with Tangent Books. These will be picture/photo-based and by photographers from the scene. **As told to Jason Draper**

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