

SOUND-INK. BROOKLYN BEATS AND THE AGRICULTURE

A trio of eclectic Brooklyn labels creates a home for bastard soul, roof music and broken-down beats.

Words: Jesse Serwer
Photo: Jessica Miller



▲ Sound-Ink's Alex Threadgold (left) and Nat Gossman

Bastard Soul, the title of an upcoming Sound-Ink Records compilation, goes a long way towards capturing the output of the three-year-old Brooklyn label. "We're interested in different styles rubbing up against each other and sometimes making life happen, albeit illegitimately," says Alex Threadgold, who (along with Heat Sensor's Nat Gossman) runs Sound-Ink out of his Cobble Hill apartment. "Sound-Ink is about the babies soul-derived music would rather leave unclaimed, for giving their orthodox parents the middle finger."

Founded in 2001, the label is quickly becoming one of the county's top sources for left-field hip-hop. Best known for assembling and conceptualizing Viktor Vaughn's *Vaudeville Villain* album with a still-on-the-rise MF Doom, the label has since released a bumper crop of producer-driven 12"s from Heat Sensor, fellow Viktor Vaughn beat contributor King Honey, South Africa's Markus Wormstrom, Egyptian breakbeat scientist DJ Mutamassik, and separate releases from Antipop Consortium/Airborn Audio members M Sayyid and High Priest.

"Almost everything we've released, I've had my hands in, in one way or another," says Gossman, who handles the technical side of the label out of his Fort Greene home/studio. "When we recorded Viktor Vaughn, Doom was sleeping on my floor with his 10-year-old kid."

But Sound-Ink isn't the only label filling the ADD-beats-meet-high-concept hip-hop void left open by the disappearance of Skiz Fernando's Wordsound Records. Next to the J-M-Z tracks in a still un-gentrified stretch of South Williamsburg is the headquarters of Brooklyn Beats, the head-music emporium run by transplanted Midwesterners Criterion "Crito" Thornton and Heather Leitner (who batter beats together as Criterion & Doily). Perhaps the most expressly political label to work in the still largely apolitical field of electronic music, the label was birthed with a handful of CDRs at the start of the CD burning age in 1999. Notably releases included Criterion's deconstruction of down-home truckin' songs, *Brooklyn Truckers*

Union 003, and the *Brutal Police Menace* compilation, a reaction to Giuliani-era police brutality and a benefit for LES anarchist headquarters ABC No Rio.

While the political edge has been toned way down, it still colors the label, periodically rising to the surface. Godspeed You Black Emperor! drummer Aidan Girt, recording as 1-Speed Bike (a.k.a. Bottleskup Flenkenmike), recently dropped absurdist Mark Stewart-style political observations on "There's An Oil Tanker Named Condoleezza Rice" from his recent "El Gallito" EP. They've also dropped early 7"s from the likes of DJ/Rupture and Donna Summer/Jason Forrest as part of their (sic) series—which references the odd spelling of their name. "People always misspell our name," Crito complains. "It's pretty simple, though: the music is broken beats and we're in Brooklyn."

In far northern Greenpoint, Williamsburg scene pioneer DJ Olive (Gregor Asch) runs his five-year-old label The Agriculture with the help of Bryan Kasenic (a.k.a. DJ Spinoza), a roommate of Criterion and Doily's and the man behind The Bunker party at Subtonic in the Lower East Side. Olive, apparently, is also suffering from public perception issues.

Olive, who birthed the term illbient while inadvertently developing the sound in the mid-'90s as one-third of We, has since moved in new directions. To that effect, Asch has coined a new term to describe the multi-faceted urban soundclash typified by *Bodega*, his first solo album as DJ Olive: roof music.

"When you have a loft party in a place like Brooklyn you have house music, downtempo, and dancehall coexisting in the same place—just all this information passing by up on the roof, where you have a barbecue, and Latin sounds coming from the street," Olive says. "We try to make urban dance music that has that earthy kind of feel—vinyl that really has a shelf life" www.theagriculture.com, www.brooklynbeats.net, www.sound-ink.com