

LABEL OF LOVE NEEDLE MYTHOLOGY

Q&A Pete Paphides
(founder)

Interview: Jamie Atkins

There's plenty you can tell about the coming fortunes of a record label from the enthusiasm of those behind it. So, judging from the state of my wants list after an hour or so sat around the kitchen table of its founder – writer and broadcaster **Pete Paphides** – the future of **Needle Mythology** looks rosy. From waxing lyrical about Barry Booth's 1968 album, *Divisions* (featuring lyrics by future Pythons Terry Jones and Michael Palin) to praising the musical comfort food of Eleanor Friedberger's third solo album, 2016's *New View*, Paphides has the sort of zealot's enthusiasm for music that can cause otherwise sane individuals to gaze longingly at the label logo and catalogue number on a sleeve and think, "I could do that."

And now Paphides' daydreams have become reality, with his first pair of releases about to hit the racks. They've been a while in the making. A few years back, following his weekly Soho Radio show, Paphides happened to bump into vinyl enthusiast and record label manager, Will Harris. Naturally, the conversation turned to the contents of Pete's record box, which happened to include a lone CD among the vinyl – Ian Broudie of The Lightning Seeds' 2004 solo album, *Tales Told*. According to Will, "I love The Lightning Seeds, but this record had somehow escaped my attention. This was a totally unacceptable state of affairs for Pete, so he literally forced the CD into my hands and told me to go home and listen to it!"

This got the pair thinking about other albums that were long due a vinyl release. One thing led to another, and Needle Mythology began



to take shape. With the first two releases on Needle Mythology – reissues of that Broudie album, plus the original configuration of Stephen Duffy's *I Love My Friends* (1998), each featuring fanbait bonuses – imminent, *RC* was keen to find out more, starting with the big question.

Why start a label?

The short answer is that there were a bunch of records that I wanted to have in my collection and I didn't, because they just didn't exist on vinyl. So I had to put them out myself.

And why Needle Mythology?

It's the name of a song from Duffy, the Stephen Duffy album prior to the one we're putting out. I like the double meaning. The protagonist in the song is a girl who's lost her way in life because she's fallen for the mythology that surrounds hard drugs. About six years ago I hosted two series' of a show for 6Music called *Vinyl Revival* and I persuaded Stephen to record a jingle for me based on Needle Mythology. So it's been kicking around in my head for a while as a good name for a label, while giving a nod to my favourite songwriter.

So it's fitting that *I Love My*



Pete Paphides in his record room: "It's all a bit of a dream"

Friends by Duffy is one of the first releases. How did that happen?

I'd been a fan of his for a long while. I used to write him fan letters and always followed his progress. I'm from Birmingham, too, so there was a certain amount of civic pride in his early success. I thought it was just so brilliant that he jacked in the solo career to form this group called The Lilac Time. I read about them before I heard them but even so, I was so sold on the idea of just abandoning the 80s prematurely – of the group going off to The Malverns to live in a house and make this pastoral pop music. Nobody else was doing anything like that at the time.

Then I heard the records and loved them. I edited a fanzine [*Perturbed*] and interviewed him for that and when I moved to London we kind of became friends but I never stopped being a fan. So, when he was due to release *I Love My Friends* on Indolent, then BMG's indie subsidiary, he sent me a cassette – because it was the 90s and there were still cassettes. I heard it and thought, "He's done it. This is his masterpiece."

Over the Christmas of 1996 I just became obsessed with it. It was confessional but had these quiet moments alongside power-pop; the sonic landscape of the record was always changing and the tunes and lyrics were brilliant.

A few weeks later I heard the record company was saying that they didn't hear any singles on it, so they wanted him to work with Andy Partridge on a few more songs, because apparently the magical formula of Britpop success was

contained in Andy Partridge's shed. The next thing I'd heard, Stephen had taken Mao Badge and In The Evening Of Her Day, these two absolute career-highlight songs, off the album. These lovely, baroque, orchestral, expansive and beautiful songs made way for these perfectly pleasant but not exceptional Andy Partridge productions. It was still a good album – two songs can't make that much of a difference – but I just thought, "One day this has to come out as originally intended."

And how about the Ian Broudie LP?

I'd always loved him. Even when he became known as the Three Lions bloke, to me he was the guy who produced the Bunnymen, Shack and The Pale Fountains – this unassuming but influential figure on the Liverpool post-punk scene. The Lightning Seeds had slightly gone to ground – I think Three Lions had burned them out a little bit – and he was pondering his options. He was going through a period of turbulence in his personal life and was a bit lost so he went back to what he knew, which was producing young bands.

Tales Told came out on Deltasonic in 2004. I put it on and was quite shocked because it was quite fragile and emotionally bare – he sounds almost a bit shell-shocked, like he's not quite sure what's going to happen to him. It was a bit heart-breaking to hear the guy who wrote *Pure* – to me, the perfect love song – writing songs that seem to be an inversion of that; when you can no longer believe in perfect love what are you left with? And that's what *Tales Told* is.

Photo: Billy-Dean Cohen





**“This is ridiculous, he just had a whole album he didn’t put out... and we get to do it”:
Needle Mythology’s reissue of
Stephen Duffy’s *I Love My
Friends* was a welcome
opportunity for Paphides
to “sweat the
small stuff”**

He was producing The Coral and The Zutons in Liverpool so basically, he’d go to his hotel at night and write, then bring these songs into the studio. So in between doing their songs he’d say, “Look, do you wanna play on this?” Which give it that that informal quality. Certain records are like a moment in time; snapshots of an unrepeatable moment in someone’s life, and they have that intimacy that goes with that. That’s what *Tales Told* means to me. It’s a beautiful record.

How did you come to release it?

About 10 years ago I interviewed him and said, “One day I’d like to release that on vinyl because it’s not really fair that it didn’t come out.” With Ian, you can’t get it into your head that he’s ever been famous because everything he projects is completely counter to that... So he said, “Yeah, sure, that’ll be great.” And because he’s so casual, you think he’s humouring you.

I got in touch nine years later and said [suddenly animated], “Ian, I’m thinking of starting a label and, you know, we had a conversation that time and you said, ‘Sure.’ Were you serious? Cos I’d actually really like to do that and we’ve got distribution.” And he just said, “Yeah, yeah, I was serious, sure.” It’s like you’ve known him forever, he’s so easy to get along with. He’d had approaches from other labels but knew how much of a fan of the record I am.

Which brings its own pressures...

Obviously, yeah. I mustn’t fuck this up because he’s shown faith in me.

How did you go about making the records special?

Records are expensive these days. So you have to make them special – if you’re gonna buy a vinyl album and there’s another record in there with it, that’s quite exciting. And if that record has unreleased material on it, that’s quite exciting as well. We could probably charge a little bit less if they didn’t include the extra record – I’ve been very careful to say, “This isn’t a free record.” You’re probably getting that additional record at exactly what it cost us to make.

And sourcing that extra material?

With the Ian one you get four songs, three of which have never been released before. And that was just a product of sitting in his loft and having him play me stuff. He’d say, “What do you think of this one?... And this one?” There’s a song called Something Street, which is quite bare and sparse on the record but he did a band version of it which seems to have more major chords. It sounds really good – Ian Broudie’s songs being played by The Coral: of course it’s good! I just felt like a competition winner. I used to buy this man’s records when I was at college in my late teens.

“If the record is great, its day will always come”

With the Duffy one it made sense to put those songs he worked on with Andy Partridge on a bonus 7”. It was the obvious place for them to go as they don’t really sound like the rest of the record. Then Stephen – who is quite inscrutable in many ways – said, “I’ve just been looking through the archive and I’ve found an album’s worth of songs – original and unreleased, not alternative versions, but actual songs – from that period that never came out and I’ve been listening back to them. They’re pretty good. Do you want them?” And they’re just astonishing.

I had one Sunday evening where I sat listening to them where I’m sitting now and just started laughing because I thought, “This is ridiculous, he just had a whole album he didn’t put out... and we get to do it.” He was quite specific about how he wanted it to come out. He thought it sat well as a standalone album, so he gave it its own title: *Blown Away*.

How important is the packaging?

It’s really nice to sweat the details. Like what the spine’s going to look

like. the thickness of the cardboard, what finish to use on the sleeve – that’s all a bit of a dream.

One thing we didn’t really foresee is the problem with sleeve artwork on albums that have only previously been released on CD – you can’t just blow them up to LP size. So far, we’ve been using it as an opportunity to do something different. Stephen Duffy has a design background and he had a different sleeve and images he was quite keen to use. Ian Broudie had some photographs from the same session as the album cover shoot which were printed up really large.

Which labels are you inspired by?

I love Light In The Attic; Numero are great, I don’t know how they do it; John Jervis’ waiwiya, it’s unbelievable the stuff he puts out and he’s got a day job! Ace are on a roll with Bob Stanley and Pete Wiggs doing these wonderful, thematically-connected compilations like *Paris In The Spring* and *The State Of The Union*: you just want to own them. I like compilations that tell a story that you previously didn’t know was there and Bob and Pete’s *Three Day Week* does that brilliantly. At the time, you would’ve been too close to see the story, that it was even a phenomenon – it takes someone really smart to be able to look back and say, “Each one of these records joins the dots and when you pull them all together, this happens.” In time to come, I would hope that we can diversify in terms of genres and I like the idea of going into intelligently-curated compilations. Bob’s one of my best friends and we’re constantly having conversations about fantasy compilations.

And what comes next?

We’re quite far down the line in putting together a Tanita Tikaram compilation. We’ve cleared the tracks and the next conversation we need to have with her is about artwork, so that’s quite exciting. I just think she’s this national treasure that we’ve kinda lost sight of. She’s made 10 albums and has evolved in such an interesting way. She’s got this amazing husky voice and is a brilliant lyricist. She never

does the obvious thing on her albums and uses a lot of people who sit outside the obvious pop and rock discourse. It’d be like a reintroduction – this is what you’ve been missing.

We’ve also got reissues of Robert Forster of The Go-Betweens’ solo work on the way. We’re having a meeting when Robert’s next in the UK to discuss the extra tracks that will go with each album. And then it’s a matter of getting the photographs and finding the original artwork. Then there’s The Finn Brothers, Butcher Boy, Linda Thompson and more – we’re keeping busy.

Do you have a standout album you’d love to reissue?

My dear wish is to put out the two albums Lewis Taylor made for Island [1996’s self-titled and 2000’s *Lewis II*] but the cost to license them at the moment is prohibitive, which is sad because they’re brilliant and I want people to buy them.

What has been the reality of setting up a label?

The work is far greater than I anticipated but that’s fine, I just keep going ‘till it’s done. The attention to detail that you need to have in order to do it well is absolutely necessary.

How has it been since the label’s first pair of releases were announced?

The early reaction to the label has been far in excess of anything I imagined. Just seeing that there are people out there who are actually waiting for these records to come out! I’ve had some quite emotional messages from people who were always desperate to own these things in a form that did them justice. I was always fairly confident that their day would come because they’re great records, and if the record is great its day will always come.

www.needlemythology.com

Ian Broudie’s *Tales Told* and Stephen Duffy’s *I Love My Friends* are released on 10 May.