



Research > MEMORABILIA. COLLECTING SOUNDS WITH... Brian Shimkovitz

MEMORABILIA. COLLECTING SOUNDS WITH... seeks to break through to unearth and reveal private collections of music and sound *memorabilia*. It is a historiography of sound collecting that reveals the unseen and passionate work of the amateur collector while reconstructing multiple parallel histories such as the evolution of recording formats, archiving issues, the collecting market and the evolution of musical styles beyond the marketplace.

Each episode in the series is accompanied by an additional programme featuring an exclusive music selection by each of the collectors.

PDF Contents:

- 01. Summary
- 02. Playlist
- 03. Related links
- 04. Credits
- 05. Copyright note

Mix by Brian Shimkovitz.

When Brian Shimkovitz went to Ghana on a Fulbright Scholarship for ethnomusicology in 2005, he was confronted with a rich, bizarre, puzzling and extremely varied array of music, mostly released on cassettes scattered around street markets. After interviewing a number of MCs, DJs and producers, and amassing an impressive collection of tapes from Ghana, Mali, Togo and Burkina Faso, Brian returned to Brooklyn and decided to start a blog to channel and share his extensive collection. The name of the blog was pretty self-explanatory: Awesome Tapes from Africa. Some years later, the project has turned into a full-fledged record label where he reissues all sorts of African tape rarities, from folkloric pop and left-field dancefloor gems to hip-hop bangers, shedding light on obscure sounds from across the continent.

The label has received acclaim from publications worldwide for its reissues by re-discovered legends including Ethiopian accordion and keyboard maestro Hailu Mergia, Somali funk and soul group Dur-Dur Band and Malian chanteuse Nahawa Doumbia, underscoring the broader mission of Awesome Tapes from Africa: to contribute to building the international market for African music and help a few of his favourite artists find new audiences through touring and reissues.

www.awesometapes.com

MEMORABILIA. COLLECTING SOUNDS WITH...

Brian Shimkovitz. Part II

Islamic, Christian and traditional praise music, all have a place in the market stalls across Africa, and are widely represented in Brian Shimkovitz's tape collection.

01. Summary

From different regions and in different ways, praise music in all its forms has a big impact on both the cultural economy and local music industries. In the context of many African countries, major religions from the West like Pentecostalism and Sufi Islam have been incorporated into more local, animist religious traditions. The music that results from these diffusions is often quite popular regionally and distinct-sounding to my ears.

My collection has many threads that could thematically link some of the tapes. One of the aspects I have always loved exploring, and I think it is due much more attention, is the array of gospel, spiritual and religious music of all stripes from across the continent. From praise music from Islamic chants by Ethiopia's Oromo-speaking Sufi Muslims to syrupy Tanzanian gospel choir lilt to DIY Kenya spiritual reggae, to chart-topping mainstream Ghanaian gospel, to Ethiopian Orthodox praise music by an elderly monk playing a massive begena harp, this selection touches on many of the religious recordings that have a place in market stalls in African cities.

Praise music can extend to the patronage important to musical practice in many locales. In northern Ghana, Dagomba traditional donno drummers (talking drum) sing praise to important people in the community and supporters, as with track six, by Alhassan Ibrahim. Traditional religion plays a big role in varying degrees, both in spirituality and music-laden ceremonies. Vodun praise singers from Benin, alongside the incredible drum ensembles accompanying their work, transform their adherents through the worlds they create in their music, as with track two by Alèkpéhanou. This selection is by no means exhaustive but I really learned a lot more about the breadth of practice, aesthetics and social agency associated with spiritual music in Africa.

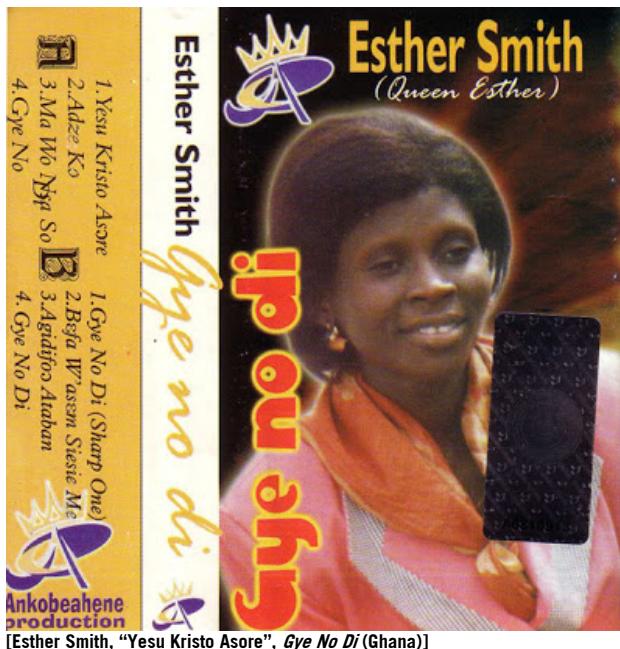
Brian Shimkovitz, Summer 2013

02. Playlist

- Yilma Hailu, 'Tewahido', *Tewahido* (Ethiopia)
- Alèkpéhanou, 'Agbon Hou Aghon', *Roi du Zinli Rénové* (Benin)
- Esther Smith, 'Yesu Kristo Asore', *Gye No Di* (Ghana)
- Mente Ntiamoa et le Groupe Musical Soleil, 'Mpeve Anlongo', *Ensengo* (Democratic Republic of Congo)
- Mohammed Awel, 'Untitled', *Menzuma 2002* (Ethiopia)
- Alhassan Ibrahim, 'Oun Be-Nkpang', *Naa Mahama-Kpema* (Ghana)
- Original Action Group, 'Okwueme', *Okwueme 99* (Nigeria)
- Kwaya Ya Patandi, 'Kazi Yake', *Msifungiwe Nira Vol 3* (Tanzania)
- National Youth Choir of Namibia, 'Jesus om 'na gwa Kalunga', *Namibian Images and Sound* (Namibia)
- Hudson W. Anekeya, 'Watu Wengine Wamtafuta Mwokozi', *Kweli Yesu Ni Bwana Wangu*
- Adorons l'Eternel, 'Kimia na Motema', *Sublime* (Democratic Republic of Congo)
- Tafese Talefaye, 'Untitled', *Zemana Getem Derasi 1989* (Ethiopia)

03. Related links

Awesome Tapes from Africa
www.awesometapes.com



[Esther Smith, "Yesu Kristo Asore", *Gye No Di* (Ghana)]

Podcast: MEMORABILIA. Collecting sounds with... Brian Shimkovitz. Part I
rwm.macba.cat/en/research/memorabilia_brian_shimkovitz/capsula

Brian Shimkovitz's mix for XL8R podcast series
www.xlr8r.com/podcast/2009/07/awesome-tapes-africa

Brian Shimkovitz's mix for RBMA podcast series
www.rbmaradio.com/shows/awesome-tapes-from-africa-train-wreck-mix

Brian Shimkovitz's tape for his Australian tour
www.mixcloud.com/TheThousands/awesome-tapes-from-africa-mixtape/

Brian Shimkovitz as a special guest on 'Mudd Up', DJ/Rupture's radio show
wfmu.org/playlists/shows/24929

Article by Brian Shimkovitz for *The Wire*'s 'Collateral Damage' column:
thewire.co.uk/in-writing/essays/p=10630

Article: 'Q&A: Awesome Tapes From Africa's Brian Shimkovitz On Cassette DJing, His New Label, And His Overflowing Mailbox'
blogs.villagevoice.com/music/2011/09/awesome_tapes_from_africa_brian_shimkovitz_interview.php

Article: 'Cassette Culture: An Interview with Awesome Tapes from Africa's Brian Shimkovitz'
www.icrates.org/cassette-culture-an-interview-with-awesome-tapes-from-africas-brian-shimkovitz/

04. Credits

Music selection by Brian Shimkovitz. Edited with a tape deck and Audacity.

05. Copyright note

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