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## Music

# Mountain of Leopards a little label with big ideas

By [James Reed](#) | GLOBE STAFF MAY 13, 2013



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**Eli Schwartz (left, who releases music under the name Saul Conrad), Schwartz's 32-year-old parrot, Chico, and engineer Jason Bitner at the home of Mountain of Leopards Records, an independent label founded by Schwartz in Jamaica Plain.**

Entering Eli Schwartz's home on a quiet street in Jamaica Plain, you don't know where

to fix your eyes. Maybe on the giant wooden statue of an African man with his head cast downward. Or the record player lined with albums by David Bowie and George Jones. Kindly step over the two guitars in the living room, one on the floor, the other propped up.

Then there's the man himself. In a purple shirt, the 24-year-old Schwartz greets a reporter recently with a nest of brown curls nearly grazing his eyes and a beard just as full. Perched on his shoulder is a parrot he regularly leans in to kiss on its head.

"This is Chico. He's 32 years old," Schwartz says as Chico mutters a few lines you can almost understand.

The whole scene is a suitably colorful and kooky setting for Mountain of Leopards Records, an independent label that Schwartz started out of his home late last year. The apartment, which he owns and shares with his girlfriend, whose vibrant artwork is all over the place, doubles as a home and recording studio.

In synch with the arrival of Deep Thoughts, a new indie record store not far down the road on Centre Street in JP, Mountain of Leopards is one of the more intriguing additions to Boston's music scene, with a roster that just happens to include all local artists at this point.

Under the pseudonym Saul Conrad, partly out of a fear that Mountain of Leopards will seem like a vanity project, Schwartz has put out his own music on the label. His "Poison Packets" was the first release, in November, and it served as a mission statement for what

Mountain of Leopards is about: the artist's vision, no matter how scattershot it may come across. His songs were dense tangles of opaque songwriting and influences ranging from 1960s psychedelia to old country.

Schwartz is excitable about his new venture, admitting he doesn't think about it in a linear fashion. When asked what kind of musicians he wants to sign to the label, he

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*'We're trying to find a way to sell art that's completely idiosyncratic.'*

launches an impassioned parable that touches on Ezra Pound, James Joyce, and the Symbolist movement in poetry.

The abbreviated version goes like this: “I want to collect a group of people who in some way are fighting for the world to respond to musical art in a different way than the world has before,” Schwartz says. “I want to release music where you really hear someone trying to remake their life or take the raw material of their life and reorder it in music.”

Kevin Haugh, who’s also at Schwartz’s apartment during the interview, is a good example of that. He first met Schwartz while he was jamming with some other local musicians at an old guitar store in West Roxbury. It was a casual setting, until Haugh realized that Schwartz was transfixed enough to record Haugh’s performance on his iPhone. Based on that lonesome country song, “Only Think of You (When I Drink),” Schwartz signed Haugh to the label, and suddenly Haugh was making “Straight In,” his first-ever album — at 64. It came out a few weeks ago.

“It all came together real good with Eli. It was magical,” Haugh says, adding that he had never even been in a studio before.

Schwartz will release his second album as Saul Conrad, the piano-heavy “The Fancy,” on June 25. The next batch of albums should arrive in the fall, including releases by Mike Greenstein, Katie Schecter, and Will Harrington, a 17-year-old blues musician Schwartz discovered busking on the street in Provincetown who reminded him of Robert Johnson and Nina Simone.

Running Mountain of Leopards is Schwartz’s full-time job, and he’s got his hands full: scouting the talent, recording the albums, assembling the musicians who play on them, packing and shipping the products (which are available on CD, vinyl, and through the usual online retailers). It’s a labor of love, to say the least, and Schwartz concedes that his roster isn’t for everyone.

“We’re trying to find a way to sell art that’s completely idiosyncratic,” he says. “Even if we miss 99 out of 100 people, I’m hoping our audience will be the kind of audience

who hears our music and thinks, ‘This could really change my life.’”

*James Reed can be reached at [jreed@globe.com](mailto:jreed@globe.com). Follow him on Twitter [@GlobeJamesReed](https://twitter.com/GlobeJamesReed).*

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