

Local record label gathers artists for concert tomorrow

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Question: What do New York City-based jazz trumpeter/vocalist Nate Birkey, Ojai art-pop singer-songwriter Julie Christensen and Santa Barbara eclectic music outfit have in common?

Answer: They all record for the same independent record label – Household Ink. The Santa Barbara-based imprint turns 20 this fall, and to celebrate the milestone all those above acts plus the erstwhile post-Beatlesque pop-rock band flapping, Flapping are gathering at SOhO for an evening concert on Sunday.

Household Ink now boasts 30-something titles, including several by acts, all with Santa Barbara connections, even if they may no longer reside on the south coast. The genres range all over the map, as, by now, do some of the label's artists.

But the main thread throughout, however, is Joe Woodard. The Santa Barbara-bred songwriter-guitarist is much better known as a freelance entertainment journalist whose voluminous output goes a long way toward filling up the Santa Barbara News-Press's Scene magazine each Friday, where he covers pop, rock, jazz and art.

His writing also appears regularly in the Santa Barbara Independent (the "Fringe Beat" column and movie reviews) as well as such national publications as Downbeat.



COURTESY PHOTO / Kim Reiersen

Local songwriter-guitarist and freelance entertainment journalist Joe Woodard's Headless Household: (clockwise, from lower left) Dick Dunlap, Chris Symer, Joe Woodard, Tom Lackne.

It was a long-ago article, in fact, that sparked the idea of forming Household Ink, long before it became fashionable

everywhere, Woodard said.

"I had done a story on a new music

See **HOUSEHOLD**, page 18

distribution service in New York, a company that was started by (downtown avant garde artist) Carla Bley for all the outcasts and weirdos who made music that wouldn't appeal to more than 1,000 people," Woodard recalled. "They had a massive number of artist-run labels there. The idea came up for Headless Household to start it's own. And we thought, 'Why the hell not?'"

Fast forward 20 years: vinyl is long gone, Household now has seven records out on the label, and more than a dozen other artists have recorded at least one for the imprint.

Ever the impresario, Woodard will be performing with three of the four groups playing Sunday night, omitting only Birkey's outfit.

"Hmmm, I need to address that (slight)," Woodard said earlier this week, tongue planted firmly in cheek. "It does look like I'm the egomaniacal record company owner, forcing himself into each project. But it's really not like that at all."

Indeed, virtually everyone on the HI roster had a connection to Woodard long before recording for the label, with most employing Woodard – a consummate guitarist (unlike many rock scribes, he can actually play too) – as a side man in concert before he appeared on the

records.

For his part, Woodard would just as soon get some non-connected artists recording for Household Ink.

"It's virtually all people who are attached to the organism, part of a group, friends, or friends of friends," he said. "I'd love to branch out and bring people into the fold, and avoid that whole incestuous, nepotistic thing."

The bigger issue however, is the dearth of time he can conjure to be playing music himself much at all, Woodard said.

"People think I've got it made because I get to go to concerts for a living. I love that work, and I love music, but it's a parasitic task. I have this powerful creative urge to make my own music. I have a pile of 400 songs, about maybe 100 of which I've recorded or performed. So I'm wallowing in frustration, at times. My goal is to do 50-50, and the dilemma is how to achieve that balance."

One small step is the revival of flapping, Flapping, which has been dormant since putting out "Montgomery Street" in 1996, when Toad the Wet Sprocket leader joined up for an album and short performing stint. The band will be making its first live appearance in a decade, with original guitarist Rob Taylor back in the fold.

"We're working on a new album right now," Woodard said.