



Photo by Paul Wellman

Headless Household Celebrates Holidays, Anniversaries at Center Stage

Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree

By Brett Leigh Dicks

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Santa Barbara's favorite staple of musical eccentricity, Household Ink, truly embodies the notion of a little label with big ideas. When S.B. musical sage Joe Woodard created the label in 1987, it was meant to serve as a promotional chariot for the Headless Household music collective. Now having released some 30 titles by a myriad of local artists, Household Ink has since evolved into one of the most curiously dynamic outlets for recorded music on the West Coast. A reflection

perhaps of the insatiable musical appetite that characterizes its founder, the label flourishes in its diversity. And while the idea of starting a record label might have been seeded by nothing more than a passing comment, it was something Woodard quickly and passionately embraced.

“The late ’80s, unlike now, were a time when putting out your own records and starting your own label wasn’t nearly as common, cheap, or easy as it is today,” said Woodard. “However, there has been a tradition in fringe music to go the do-it-yourself route. I had been in New York City to write an article on this visionary indie distribution organization called the New Music Distribution Service, started up by jazz great Carla Bley. The head of it, Yale Evelev, told me, ‘Everyone should have a label,’ half tongue-in-cheek. I took it to heart, and with the help of a generous money influx from family and friends, we launched the thing. We got a PO Box, a fictitious business statement, and Household Ink Records was born.”

In a town abundant with vibrant record labels — including Matinee, Corporate Nightmare, Lobster, and Wednesday — Household Ink stands as a shining testament to the diversity of the Santa Barbara music scene. The label’s collective spans the musical spectrum with its various releases from jazz, pop, soul, and folk. Even still, the finished products are all beautifully drawn together by a collective injection of heart and soul. Be it Headless Household’s Zappa-esque embrace of the polka, the luscious art-pop of Julie Christensen, or the enthused folk of the irrepressible Dudley, Woodard has consciously given the label the space to evolve in its own way.

Headless Household 18th Annual Christmas Concert

- **When:** [Monday, Dec. 3, 2007](#), 8 p.m.
- **Where:** Center Stage Theater, 751 Paseo Nuevo, Santa Barbara, CA
- **Cost:** \$9 - \$12
- **Age limit:** Not available

[Full event details](#)

“As the label developed, organically and without willful intent, the phrase ‘a regional, eclectic label’ seemed the most concise and true way to describe its musical direction, or directions,” explained Woodard. “As we’re all interested in a wide array of musical styles, from experimental noise to pretty tunes, it made sense to include that range in the mix. I would say, though, that a certain attitude prevails throughout the catalogue, having to do with a love of traditions, but also a love of tugging and tweaking existing styles; searching for a new way to approach music. Nothing is straight down the middle, including our approach to free improvisation and digital sound collage.”

While Household Ink certainly celebrates its love of experimentation, the “pretty tunes” to which Woodard alludes include a handful of carefully polished pop gems — including Christensen’s recent release, the effervescent *Where the Fireworks Are*. Having sung with everyone from Leonard Cohen to Lou Reed, and having recently been an intricate part of the Hal Willner-produced tributes to Cohen, Christensen had played the role of the Polka Queen at several infamous Headless Household gatherings. So when it came time for Christensen to turn her

attention to creating a new album of her own, it was at the door of Woodard's household where she went knocking.

“When I started working on the project that became *Where the Fireworks Are*, I looked to Joe and to Tom Lackner, with whom I'd done some gigs,” recalled Christensen. “I told Joe that I would do anything for him and his muse ... including sounding like Mary Poppins on speed! But I asked if we could please retire the Polka Queen in favor of this folk-art-rock thing I had in mind. Joe said he and Tom took ‘about 30 seconds’ to decide to jump on board. Many side roads and almost three years of hairpin turns and bumpy creative hills later, *Fireworks* became the second of two of my albums to be harbored on the Household Ink label.”

On Monday, December 3, Household Ink's meandering jazz riffs, poignant soul, pristine pop, and polka queens will be brought to Center Stage Theater as part of Headless Household's 18th Annual Xmas Concert. The night will feature S.B. luminaries, such as Dick Dunlap, Lackner, Woodard, Christensen, Tom Buckner, David Piltch, Glen Phillips, Sally Barr, Kenny Edwards, and Bill Flores. And don't be surprised if a special guest or two drop by to join in on the fun. And while he and his charges might now be two decades into the Household Ink journey, Woodard doesn't envisage the adventure ending any time soon.

“Household Ink was one of those projects that came out of nowhere, really, and without any intention or direction,” mused Woodard. “Suddenly, we're 20 years into it with more than 30 titles in multiple genres, yet it all seems both strange and logical. It all comes down to the idea that, for those afflicted with the need to make music, music must happen and be made manifest in the world. As long as that impulse propels us, I don't see the end of the Headless Ink story anytime soon.”

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Headless Household's 18th Annual Xmas Concert will take place on Monday, December 3, at 8 p.m. at Center Stage Theater (751 Paseo Nuevo). Tickets are \$9-\$12, and can be purchased by calling 963-0408 or visiting centerstagetheater.org.