UP002660 Practice Oral History Project

Detroit, MI

Brad Hales

Interviewed by

Christine Cook

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As part of the Oral History Class in the School of Library and Information Science

Kim Schroeder, Instructor

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Brief Biography

Brad Hales grew up in Wyandotte, Michigan, and developed an interest in music and in records as a young child. After working in several record stores in Southeast Michigan, he started People's Records in downtown Detroit in 2003. In addition to his record store, Brad Hales has continued to play bass guitar, and when the interview took place, he was the bassist for a band called The Human Eye. Over the years, he has learned a lot about the history of blues, jazz, and R&B in Detroit.

Interviewer

Christine Cook is currently studying for a PhD in History at Wayne State University. During college and for two years after graduation for her Bachelors, she worked at progressive radio stations, as a disc jockey and assistant program and production manager.

Abstract

In this interview, Brad Hales describes how he got interested in the music industry in Detroit. He talks about playing bass with his band, The Human Eye, and also playing backup for a number of Detroit musicians. He explains how he started selling records and then established People's Records. People's Records is known for selling rare Jazz, R&B, and Blues records, with a focus on the Detroit music scene. Hales has a real interest and depth of knowledge about Detroit music, and in this interview, he tells a lot about that scene, above and beyond what the layman knows about Motown. In addition, he explains how to best clean and repair records to get the best sound from them. This subject is important to him because of what rare Detroit records can be worth, especially for "Northern Soul" fans, who exist around the world. Finding the records can be a challenge, and he tells about that process, as well. Now that People's Records has a location at Trinosophes, near Eastern Market, he discusses plans for branching out, by starting a museum of Detroit music memorabilia, and developing a radio station to play some of the rare music he has found. He talks about the years when his

record store was in the Cass Corridor, and reminisces about what the Cass Corridor was like in the 1990s and early 2000s.

Restrictions

None

Original Format

Digital Wave file, recorded using SoundBooth.

Transcription:

CCOOK: Today is November 9, 2016. My name is Christine Cook. I am talking with Brad Hales, owner of People's Records in Detroit, and bassist for the band, Human Eye, at his record store on Livernois in Detroit.

BHALES: Hello.

CCOOK: Hello. So, tell me how you got involved in the music industry in Detroit.

BHALES: Hmm. Well, even, I guess from playing music as early as, as age ten I started playing the guitar, and learning about a lot of different kinds of music through my parents' albums, which were mostly classic rock, and then from the songs you could hear on the radio back then, between WDET and then definitely the Electrifying Mojo and programs like Radio in Motion, Radios in Motion, you'd hear all these different things on the radio that could lead you down a lot of different interesting musical avenues. And so I was discovering punk and jazz at the same time, and rap music and hip-hop were still kind of, you know, in--not really in their infancy, but they were still young and healthy. And so it was just an exciting time to be around and take it, take it all in. And I just led to me trying to find jobs where I could, you know, do something with music, because it was what I enjoyed the most, so I worked in Musicland shop in the mall first and then Encore Records in Ann Arbor in the mid-90s, then Desirable Discs in Dearborn at the end of the nineties, before opening my own shop, People's Records, in two thousand and three.

CCOOK: Okay, and when did you start? You said that, you know, when you first got it started you were interested in punk, you were interested in jazz--but approximately what time?

BHALES: First got interested in it?

CCOOK: Yeah, at what time?

BHALES: I mean, when I was a child, I remember buying forty-fives myself at a garage sale when I was four before we moved to Florida when I was, 'cause I remember you know, seeking out my own music even then and really, you know, begging my parents to buy me certain songs that I liked and things like that, so I was always trying to acquire music, play music, you know, having a toy drum set as a kid, taking guitar lessons at age ten.

CCOOK: Mmhmm. What year, what year was that?

BHALES: Uh, let's see, if I was ten, it would have been 1984.

00:02:32

CCOOK: 1984. Okay, great. So you, you are also a bassist, you learned how to play guitar. So, tell me about your band.

BHALES: Oh, I play with kind of a psychedelic punk group called Human Eye that's existed for about ten years now, although we haven't been very active in the past year. Our leader is Timmy Vulgar, who also led the Clone, the Clone Defects and currently his more active group, Timmy's Organism. So it's kind of art punk band I guess, sometimes with paint flying everywhere, loud, loud psychedelic guitar, and sometimes an improvisational approach, and other times more like a punk band. It's, it's a lot of fun. A lot of songs have space themes, or kind of science fiction and conspiracy theory kind of subject matter. So, a lot of weird stuff but also like a fun approach to it at the same time. Not too heavy handed or preachy but more, more, more fun.

CCOOK: Okay. So you say psychedelic punk. Is that like Iggy and the--Iggy Pop?

BHALES: That's definitely something we like. I think, sometimes our music is faster than that, but that's definitely somebody that we like. That's a good touchstone for that.

CCOOK: What other influences?

BHALES: I mean, to someone who, let's say that someone had listened to a lot of punk bands. You could say that it was similar to The Who or Jimi Hendrix in terms of, like, level of intensity, or, like the styles of music.

CCOOK: So sixties punk versus seventies punk.

BHALES: I guess so, mmhmm, but that's still in there.

CCOOK: Yeah, oh yeah, absolutely.

BHALES: Back in the eighties and stuff. There's, I mean, we, you know, we like all that, too. Or, it all goes into the soup somehow.

00:04:21

CCOOK: Right, right. Okay, so you play the bass, you play the guitar, any other instruments you play?

BHALES: Well, I've played, I've played with lots of R&B and other musicians as well. I've played bass for Rodriguez, for Cody Black, who's now passed away, a legendary Ohio and Michigan R&B singer. I played bass with Nathaniel Mayer, who was with Fortune Records in the early sixties...

CCOOK: Okay.

BHALES: ...and had a big national hit with "The Village of Love," so I got to play with him before he passed away. As well as playing with a soul band now, currently, called the Ultimate Ovation, which is a vocal group, like a family vocal group that's been together since the seventies. So...I got to play with Kenny Martin before he passed. I played with the punk singer Jon Brannon, in a group called Easy Action, for a few years. Kind of before I was starting the record shop, and that took everything over.

CCOOK: Okay. Right.

BHALES So I was trying to play different, with different rock and R&B people that are older than me and have more experience and I could learn from them, and I like their music and think it's good, so, it's fun.

CCOOK: Exactly, exactly. So, how did the band form? How did Human Eye form?

BHALES: Well, I wasn't in the band initially but I was...I saw their first performance 'cause I was already a fan of the Clone Defects. So when they started and it was something new and fresh from that, I was really excited and thought, oh, this is the best band in town, so when they needed a bass player I just asked if I, oh, can I please, you know, do this? I'd really love to do that. And, so I was really happy that I got a chance to play with them.

00:06:04

CCOOK: Great, great. So, how did you get into the record business?

BHALES: Between working at record shops I'd taken a job at Wayne State University, but I really wanted to find records for myself as a DJ and just, it seemed like everything was escaping and kind of just all getting sold away to people who were going to take it out of town to sell it, or people who were going to put everything on eBay. So I wanted to have a store as kind of a retainer for that, where you do need to sell some stuff on the internet to make ends meet but you can also, I'd rather if you came in here and bought it from me instead. You know, so it was a way to find, I opened the store as a way to find the things I was looking for, just by using my own collection as a start. And I said, well, we'll get, we'll get a place and I'll put all my things in there and just sell one and then buy more with that. So it just started like that with no kind of savings and no business plan or knowledge. (laughs) Just kind of haphazardly.

CCOOK: Great, and you said it started about what, twelve years ago?

BHALES: Two thousand and three.

CCOOK: Two thousand three. Okay. And where has it been, 'cause I know you said there's been six locations?

BHALES: We started in the basement of the Forest Arms apartments next to Wayne State, which famously burnt down in two thousand eight, and now is re--

CCOOK: Were your records in there, too?

BHALES: Yes

CCOOK: Oh...

BHALES: Our store was in the basement, and so this was a fire that burnt all night from, you know, two in the morning or so it started, and burnt through to the morning and everything. So the top two floors were burnt out, and our stuff in the basement was you know, just flooded, and then they boarded up the building, so there was mold and ice and it was, everything.

CCOOK: I think I remember that fire.

BHALES: So then we started over and then moved to two different locations on Woodward Avenue. We kept getting, getting priced out of the neighborhood. And then we landed in Eastern Market, at our friend Phil and Rebecca's place, Trinosophes, which is a fantastic cafe and gallery and music venue in Eastern Market. So, they offered us a much larger place, where we could expand on our museum idea, and kind of unpack a lot more, have more room. And then we finally started this place, where we are now, at Livernois, in the Green Acres neighborhood of Detroit, by Baker's Keyboard Lounge.

CCOOK: Okay, and let's see. So, how did this one start? We're at Livernois today, right?

BHALES: Mmhmm, I wanted--that place was getting too cluttered, so I wanted to clear out a lot of things and make it, try to make it more

streamlined again. And focus on the museum idea there, and try to develop a radio station there, and have a community radio outlet. So it was an effort to do that, but in moving up here, this place kind of wound up taking over for me, where I'm not able to get down there because I have to mind this, to get this place off of its feet.

CCOOK: Off of its feet? (laughs)

BHALES: Onto its feet, sorry. Yeah. Off of its back, I guess. So, we're just working here, and getting this one together. It's growing, growing every day, since May.

00:09:43

CCOOK: So it's been here since May. So, tell me what you're looking for with People's Records. You said that, you know, you started it to basically get what, some of the stuff you were interested in, but, what, what is its personality now? What kind of records come in here?

BHALES: We're known for Jazz and R&B records, which is something that Detroit has but not all cities do. We have such a fantastic history here, for both of those things, so those are areas that we focus on and specialize in. As well as blues, and gospel and dance music. We find what rock we can. We have a section for everything. Like, we sell hip hop and country and classical and opera and, you know, comedy and everything else, children's records, but not very much. So, the focus, what people come in asking us for is primarily jazz, R&B, and then dance music for DJs. They buy a lot of twelve-inch singles and soul 45s for dancing.

CCOOK: Okay, so in comparison to say, you said that you worked for Encore Records, and a couple of other places, personality-wise, how are they different from what you've done?

BHALES: Hmm...I felt really similar to Encore when it was a family business, in that it was somewhat chaotic, and it gave me the feeling I could do it, too, working there. I really liked how they were just always kind of bursting at the seams, and the stacks of everything everywhere. And you could, you'd never really get caught up and if you did it meant that it wasn't working. So, there should just be stuff coming in and piling up everywhere

if it's going to be interesting. So. I just wanted to stay busy and stay on my feet and work alongside the people that were working with me doing the same jobs, and all that. I just liked how they operated, kind of loose. And, it wasn't like working at the shop in the mall. It was more like working in a family business, which I appreciated.

00:11:40

CCOOK: That was like Encore?

BHALES: Encore.

CCOOK: What about Music...you were at Musicland, too?

BHALES: Mmhmm. That...that was just terrible. Because I was working at a CD store in the mall, and still having to wear a tie. I guess. I remember it was at the time that Nirvana, 'Nevermind' came out. So I remember working there, having to wear a tie, and then being in the mall, and just...'Oh I want to be in a music store but this really is terrible.'

CCOOK: This wasn't exactly what I had in mind.

BHALES: Not really. So finally getting a job at Encore and getting exposed to jazz and classical more and a lot of different music up there that I, you know, wouldn't have heard from rock and electronic music and all this crazy stuff you might encounter in Ann Arbor. Stuff from around the world, so it was a good all around education, before coming to Detroit and to Desirable Discs where you're swimming in jazz and R&B. Which in Ann Arbor, the jazz records are pathetic compared to what you would see, or it's all jazz but by just white artists.

CCOOK: Right. Pat Metheny.

BHALES: Yeah, lots. Hey no shortage of that, no shortage of Dave Brubeck and they're fine artists, I'm not putting them down. But coming to Detroit and seeing, you know, how many independent companies there were and just different things you'd never heard of, never dreamed of seeing, you know, because this was kind of as the Internet was in its infancy, too. So you wouldn't learn about records online like people can now. It was, you'd

find them by digging in the field, or reading, seeking out reading material and talking to other people, examining mixes and radio programs that other DJs had made. You know, really having to study and learn in a more organic way.

CCOOK: Right. Well, this was a birthplace for a lot of different forms of music, really. Like hip-hop had a strong group of people here who were doing it, and blues. A lot of people came up with the 1940s when they were building cars and then they played blues here.

BHALES: Right. Definitely, John Lee Hooker. In the 50s, everything...What's really interesting is that you, before Motown, you had the Fortune Record company on Third, and then Joe Von Battle's, JVB Records, which was over at the Black Bottom area, which was decimated. And Joe's Record Shop, which he owned, these places were like local outlets that were recording and pressing, not manufacturing them maybe, but recording and distributing their own stuff, you know, and they would have all different types of music together. Fortune had R&B and blues but they also had gospel and Hungarian music, country music, rockabilly, funk, you know. I mean, just such a wide cross-section of things, doo-wop and girl groups. But no, never just one thing. They always, you know, if somebody displayed talent they'd say 'sure, we'll record it and put it out. Let's see. You're interesting, you know, can you record, do you know something good?'

Just...so, JVB, same thing. Like, girl groups, blues, and they're most notable artist was C.L. Franklyn, Aretha's dad. He was just, before televangelists, kind of like record evangelist. I'm just selling...You still can't go through a stack of records in Detroit without seeing some of his. So these were huge independent kind of family companies, before Motown. And when that opened, it just opened up the floodgates for everyone to say, 'well, I'm going to have a record label and put out really something.' So, one of the most interesting things you can look at if you want to study Detroit music, is Ben Blackwell made a record--a map of Detroit record labels. So if you look at this Google map, and you look at the density of the dots, you'll see--

00:15:57 (buzzing sound)

--from West Grand Boulevard to Eight Mile, and from Woodward to Grand River, this whole area is so densely dotted with independent record companies for decades that might have only had one release, they might have had 20 or 30, or like in Fortune's case they had hundreds and hundreds.

00:16:18

CCOOK: Right.

BHALES: So many people were putting out 78s, 45s, albums, 12" singles. You know, Archer Records never went out of business here. You know, people every day come in to People's Records and they say, "Oh, I hear vinyl's making a comeback." And it's like, no, you used to have to wait a few months to get a record pressed in Detroit but you could always do it. But there would always be a line. Whether it was the eighties, the nineties, the two thousands, Archer Records never quit manufacturing records here within the city. And they were kept--

00:16:54 (buzz)

--alive by dance. Well, but first, you know, Motown and that type of era, but then dance music, and hip hop sustained it in a lot of dark years, by still constantly releasing 12" singles, new ones all the time, and then punk and Indie groups releasing 7" singles. So they were always kept very, very busy. And now you might have to wait six months to a year to get a record pressed, so--

CCOOK: Right. Are they still open?

BHALES: They sure are.

CCOOK: They still are. So they're still one of the ones that are making the, the "comeback"-- (laughs)

BHALES: Yeah, yeah. But the major labels keep them so busy pressing up re-issues of records that aren't even that hard to find in the first place. They'll just put out a common record and then charge thirty dollars for it now, so--

CCOOK: Insane.

BHALES: The whole thing's, the whole thing's kind of a mess.

00:17:43

CCOOK: So, it looks to me, looking around, that it's mostly just exclusively records. Is that correct?

BHALES: We have very few CDs and tapes. I mean sometimes we'll wind up with some, or a friend will release something like that and we'll carry it because we know and like the person, but it's not anything we're seeking out. We don't really order new music except for local, independent dance singles, so we'll get a lot of 12" singles by you know, by people, that we like.

CCOOK: Are they at 45 rpm?

BHALES: Mmm, 45 and 33 both, on these singles, kind of arbitrarily, just for whichever one sounded better for that piece of music. So, sometimes one side will be 33, and the other will be 45, and neither will be marked. So you have to kinda--

CCOOK: (laughs) Right. Oh, good. You'll figure it out eventually.

BHALES: Or not. You might say, oh, I liked this one better like this. You find out it wasn't even the right speed.

CCOOK: Sounds like Nash the Slash.

BHALES: Your own personal taste.

00:18:46

CCOOK: Okay, so, I did read an article where they were talking about how you get the records in, and then you do something to prepare them before you sell them, and I assume that that's cleaning them perhaps? Or, is that correct?

BHALES: We have to do lots of cleaning, definitely, because with the 45s they're very rarely ever in their sleeves. So there are lots of ways you can do it now. The most state of the art way, which I'd like to start finding out

more about is, ultrasonic cleaning. In the same way they would clean jewelry, they are, people have made adaptations to these kinds of ultrasonic tanks. You can make something to hold the record and spin it, rotate it inside the water and apparently it makes them sound much, much better than even cleaning them on the kind of machines that Audiophile stores sell. We're just constantly, it's like a car wash for records, I mean doing actual restoration work where you can repair a scratch or something.

00:19:52 (buzz)

BHALES: It is a science that exists, but it's pretty difficult and time consuming, and not an exact science, either.

CCOOK: Right.

BHALES: You can use a magnifying glass, and some kind of metal implement to kind of make, make a record that skips play again, I mean, that's not unheard of, this kind of science. Or flattening warped records, or figuring out how to remove years of nicotine and cooking grease, and just whatever they might, basement backup, you know, who knows what...you don't wanna know, what's accumulated on them--

00:20:25

(telephone rings, plus buzz)

BHALES: Hey, Johnny, would you grab this please?

CCOOK: We might have to take that out.

JOHNNY: Hello?

00: 20:51

CCOOK: Okay. So, we were talking about cleaning records. So, you were talking about the ultra-sonic and you were talking about--

BHALES: Well, it's, you can, we clean a lot of stuff on a record cleaning machine, which is like it's a vacuum, so instead of kind of spreading debris and dirt around the record, it's just removing it, which is nice. But it's, people say well, does it, can you redo a record or resurface a record and really you can't without you know, causing damage to it or degrading the

sound quality, but it's kind of like a car wash for records, I would say, where it just cleans it with brushes, and then with air, the debris is removed.

CCOOK: Right. Because I know that, back when I was in the radio station, we would have this, you know, little brush thing that we would put water on, or some kind of liquid, and would go around it as you (hand gesture of brushing the record) on the record player.

BHALES: Oh, yeah.

CCOOK: But, you know, it was not the best way to clean a record, I don't think (laughs). At least it's something.

BHALES: Mm-hmm. Some people say it can damage, but wet playing them can make something that doesn't sound that good sound-quality wise definitely sound better. It can help break through. I mean if it's something where it's like, ah, I just need to hear this or get a good recording of it because I'm not going to see it again, it's not a bad idea, but if you're doing this kind of thing, you need to make sure that your stylus stays clean because it'll cause a buildup of debris on there that will make everything sound bad. So if you're doing that just be very careful, A) not to bend or break the stylus, and B) to clean it a lot. But I mean, I've over the years found recordings, let's say it might be a forty-five, that would cost a thousand dollars. I definitely don't have a thousand dollars to spend on this record, but I've found one that's broken all the way through, so it doesn't have the resale value of a clean thousand dollar copy, but yet I can put tape on the edge of it and hold it together so it still plays from beginning to end, and no crack is detectable by hearing it, so I mean, I'm doing things like this--

CCOOK: Which is astounding...

BHALES: --To try to keep, keep things here, because with a lot of these rare Michigan recordings, there's no known copy of the record left in the state. Like the artist that made it, and the label owner don't have it any more. The only people that are known to have the record in the collectors' and DJ's world might be in Japan or England, or France or Germany, or Spain or Italy,

or someplace else where they know way more about this Michigan music than we do in most cases.

CCOOK: Right. And it's that whole thing about the, when it might become obsolescent. Because digital, is a very temporary form. A lot of people don't realize how temporary--

BHALES: I agree.

CCOOK: So, the vinyl is actually, in some ways, much better.

BHALES: And seventy-eights, too. I mean, it's astounding how these things can sit in someone's basement for the better part of a century and just look scratched to death, yet they can still produce such great sound.

CCOOK: Well, and the patina that you can get on a vinyl record, you're never going to get digitally.

BHALES: I mean, if your system is good, and the record is clean, you shouldn't hear anything. And, people do romanticize the surface noise of records and stuff, but honestly, we just got a turntable recently here, it needed some repair and a friend of ours that we trade records with fixed it up for us, and it sounds so good that I can't tell when the record is playing in the beginning, it's that quiet, so, the technology is so good with records, and incredible, that they never should have tried doing away with it. So many people sold their records and bought CDs and now regret it. But I mean, they're cumbersome; they're not efficient in a way. I mean, you have to flip the thing over half way through it, and you have to worry about storing it carefully--

CCOOK: That's the good part (laughs).

BHALES: --to preserve the sound. Right, but in this day and age, where people are just used to things being convenient and you know, hassle free and it's, it's kind of a relic of a bygone era in a way, even though some young people are picking up on it, but other people say, oh, I'll never go back to that, like, I'm not going to get a player for those things. (laughs)

CCOOK: Right. Well, we have a really nice Technics board, and the diamond stylus and we've got maybe two hundred records and what we'll do is we'll record it onto digital, and then put the record away--

BHALES: It's a lot of work, isn't it?

CCOOK: Well, it is, but at the same time, it's protecting the record so that we can still hear the music, and then when that gets done away with and we don't use that particular MP3 player anymore, we're doing it this way, then we can re-record it, and the record is still good. So, okay so, next to one of your locations, you have a museum. Or your--

BHALES: Inside the one on Gratiot Avenue, which is inside the Cafe Trinosophes--Cafe and Venue and Gallery Trinosophes--so it's many things under, under one roof. So, we're in there with a lot of basically photos and paper stuff is what our museum mostly consists of. Tons of promotional images, newspaper clippings, contracts, autographs, press kits, concert advertising and posters, just different curiosities that, you know, help tell the story of music in Michigan and the history of here, and our culture, and just what kinds of places people went, where recordings were made, you know. Things like this--like a signed check from David Ruffin with a drawing of his eyeglasses, his iconic eyeglasses, next to his address and everything, to the Watts Club Mozambique for a hundred dollars. (laughs) It's maybe to pay a bar tab--

CCOOK: Maybe... (laughs)

BHALES: or who knows, for what, maybe he threw a party there, who knows, but somehow we found--

CCOOK: And somebody kept the check.

BHALES: We found, we've been finding things like this over the years that are just way too cool to throw away and too interesting to keep just in my house for not many people to see, so I thought, oh, you know, we really need to find a way to try to just start framing things and putting it out

there, every time we find a record with an autograph of somebody you know, in town that we deem important or something like that, it's just good to put that stuff out there so people can enjoy it. Because, Detroit is such a destination, in particular, for music tourism. I mean the whole state has a big history of music, but Detroit really does. And so, you've always got people coming that are looking for records, and so it's good to show them that, no, we like this stuff, too. If you go into some stores they wouldn't know what you were talking about with some of these artists. They might, they might be able to see that record and glean that it's a Detroit record, and probably therefore could be worth something, but they might not know the name of the song or how it goes or all this stuff. So, but we're here because we're music fans, first and foremost.

CCOOK: So where did you find some of this stuff? You were saying that you got that check; where did that come from?

BHALES: People just...um...I don't even remember at this point. A lot of stuff is from people who are doing clean-outs, you know just either, they bought a property and find records inside of it, or they work for a landlord and they're cleaning things out, or maybe somebody has a deceased relative. I mean, it's all different--different kinds of ways that, we just find things inside of records sometimes, and you know, and you just wonder, where did this--

CCOOK: And why was it tucked in here?

BHALES: I've seen people bring wheelbarrows full of records, I've bought fish tanks full of loose 45s and no sleeves--

CCOOK: Oh, my gosh.

BHALES: You know, anything. Shopping carts full. So, it really runs the gamut, you know. And sometimes there can be real, real treasures in there. It can be all junk and then something, you know, really important.

00:29:36

CCOOK: So, how do you figure out the worth of something?

BHALES: With records, I would say the books that are published are misleading and useless. But I would try to see what the recent sales of something are on the Internet kind of in the world market, because the price of a record you have to look and see if there's a demand in another country that maybe you're not aware about, aware of, so it would have to be on digital these days. I mean, you can do it by ear, by listening to something, you might be able to listen to a record and say there's no way on earth anyone could ever want this. It's worth a dollar or less; it's worth a dollar if I'm lucky. But if other things, if they have a sound that a collector or DJ might be interested in some, you know, for some reason, it's just good to be aware of different...different trends and what people like in different places, too. Have an ear for as many things as possible, you can cast a bigger net, of finding something of interest.

CCOOK: Right. Right. And how are you able to figure out the rarity of certain things?

BHALES: I guess just by going through things in the same region I know which records I've seen hundreds of times and which ones I haven't seen before, so it's just kind of like a database in my own memory of, I can look at a box of records and see the tops of the covers like this (gestures to a box beside him that is full of records), and say, 'Oh, I know what that is.' Just by seeing that much of it. 'Oh, that's Stevie Wonder,' or whatever. They just become familiar because you're handling them all the time. I mean, I've always worked five or six days a week, so when you're just swimming in it, it just takes up way too much of your memory space.

CCOOK: Right. (laughs)

BHALES: But I mean, like I say, Internet research is another thing, but you shouldn't have to look up everything if you know records well. Just, only by hours in the field could you gain that, I guess.

CCOOK: Right. And you've been doing it for twelve years. Well, you've been doing it for more than twelve years.

BHALES: Much, yeah, much longer. Because I was always buying them before I was able to start working in shops in the mid-90's, so, … My job at Musicland was in nineteen, I guess, ninety, or so. So basically from then onward, on and off.

CCOOK: Sixteen, basically. And it was mostly CDs back then. Was that Musicland?

BHALES: CDs and tapes yeah. Records were pretty much phased out by that point.

CCOOK: Already gone by then. So sad. Anyway, so the museum, is it fully functional now?

BHALES: It's not fully realized in my mind. We used to have two large display cases full of stuff. Which, they're being used for an art exhibit right now because we didn't really own them. They were just on, these display cases were on loan. So we've got such an incredible archive of stuff, but just a very small percentage of it is on display. So the areas I'd like it to grow in are working on the idea of the radio station, which is tied in with it as well, because it's going to focus on Michigan music, or on just, also providing quality music for people in the area just as an educational thing and to try to help, I don't know. I feel like Detroit radio is in not a good state, there's not a lot of things I want to listen to too often, or I'm disappointed with the quality of most of the shows on public radio.

CCOOK: Well, I know that there is...WEMU? There's one station that might play stuff like that in Ypsilanti. But, yeah, there are very few, I would say, that play something other than, you know, Top 40, or …

BHALES: It could definitely be better. It could definitely be better. Looking at things like WFMU or East Village Radio in New York, it could be a good model for something that could happen here. It could give lots of people jobs and just improve the quality of life for the whole region. If we have the kind of music we are capable of putting out there. Kind of, I think it would be really life affirming and enrich the lives of people who maybe don't have access to hearing music on the computer, or maybe you don't have the

money to purchase hard to find records. You could still be learning it, hearing it and realizing how it relates to our current experience here in Michigan.

CCOOK: Right, well, and you could also create, you know, like, the radio that's on the Internet as well as a local...so that it can go anywhere.

BHALES: That's true. That's definitely the goal. That's definitely the goal and the dream. But also at the museum there's just a lot of stuff we still need to frame and display and it would be really cool to print something that people could take home with them, you know, to show them some of the photos and give them some of the history to take home and read about.

CCOOK: Right. You can make that into the gift store. (laughs)

BHALES: There you go! So, these are some ideas as we find them. Try to find funding and time.

00:35:08

CCOOK: Good. So, that tells me the next question which was, what would you like to do with the, what more would you like to do with the museum section of your store, so that kind of answers that. You've collected a lot of music-related memorabilia over the years. Is there anything in particular that you have that you think is really a treasure of your own?

BHALES: We found Parliament Funkadelic unused rolling papers, and a lot of people that were close to the group didn't even know that these ever existed. And so that was pretty crazy. They must have had them at their concerts in the '70's at some point. We have a framed picture of Billy Ward and the Dominoes, featuring Jackie Wilson when he was young, and it's signed. So that's really cool, to have a signed photo of Jackie Wilson, who passed away a long time ago and quite young. So that's special. Signatures of many of the Motown acts, like the Supremes and the Temptations. We have photographs of an obscure group called The Mynah Birds…

CCOOK: I've heard of them.

BHALES: Okay, which featured both Neil Young and Rick James on Motown records but never came to fruition, outside of the recording session that was scrapped. So that's pretty special because no one, there aren't many pictures of what the group actually looked like. So that's kind of a special one that I've still got it under wraps, just so they don't get reproduced. Because they're not seen anywhere on the Internet or anything. They used just crummy jpegs, they stole from somewhere else when they released their records for record store date. We have pictures of the Andantes, which is the vocal group that claims to have sung on most Motown records instead of the artists credited. We actually have photos of them which is another thing that's, you know, rare as hen's teeth. They tried to really keep them in the shadows.

CCOOK: Interesting.

BHALES: So, I don't know. A lot of stuff like that. A lot of good stuff about the history of the soul of R&B music outside of Motown as well. Because there are an army of producers and singers and groups and all this talent that is primarily recognized in England. People in other countries know about it and people across the U.S. know about it and love it, but here, you don't hear much about "Popcorn" Wylie, or Johnnie Mae Matthews, or groups like The Precisions, or something like this. But if these groups go to England, where, when they were alive a lot of these people would travel there. They'd be astounded by how everybody knew every word to their songs at these events and they had this quite dedicated cult following with the Northern Soul subculture from the '70's onward. So they were the most instrumental and kind of like cataloguing and anthologizing Detroit music.

And, you know, organizing this, you know, multitude of labels releasing soul and R&B music from the '50's, '60's, '70's, and '80's. We just, we had some of the best quality stuff of any, any city. And nothing can really compare to it in my opinion. So, people will say, 'Oh, you mean one hit wonders?' I say, 'No, like we mean no hit wonders.' These artists, like Eddie Parker, "I'm Gone," probably never got played on the radio, ever in Detroit, I mean, maybe once or twice. But, you know, overseas it's worth over $7,000 or something. Northern Soul fans love it, from here to Mexico to Spain to Germany. All these groups, like the Tomangoes. Another, like, five-to-ten

thousand dollar record. No one in Detroit outside of a very small handful of people knows who the Tomangoes are, or what they sang, so I feel like it's our job to try to hold onto that here, to hold the torch for that.

Because these people can't get a gig in their hometown, and yet, over there, there, you know, people start crying if they heard this song performed. So it's something really special here we have in our own backyards. That, it's not like we threw away; it's like it wasn't even considered. It wasn't even given to us to consider. Because Motown could pay the DJs to play their records and say, 'don't play theirs, play ours.' You know. And there were many other worthy competitors that were kind of shelved and kept on the sidelines. And they just didn't have the same network backing them, you know.

CCOOK: I think that's almost happening again, now, with people who put their music up on the internet and people start buying it and nobody in the radio stations even know the name, but they're suddenly a--

BHALES: Isn't that interesting? It can happen because of YouTube or because of social media or anything, so now it's kind of like how well people can market and expose themselves successfully and having something that, people's attention spans are so short, you know, so who knows what makes teenagers like things now? But, it's just, they, they have to have something they can click on, their friends are talking about it because they saw it on the internet, whatever.

CCOOK: We could put Eddie Parker on there, and suddenly…

BHALES: He's on there! And if you go, if you need to hear any of this stuff you can go on YouTube and someone's put it on there just, just because, you know. And made some kind of goofy little video to go along with it of just, you know, the different imagery that goes along with that stuff. But this is a subculture that defines who these people are. I mean, it's interesting because if you go to a rock and roll show in the U.S., it might be primarily younger people, you know, if it was like a punk band, or something. But if you go to Northern Soul events, you've got people who are 17 and you've got people who are 70. And so it's really incredible, you

know, they're all really excited about the same thing, and sometimes behaving badly, and just, you know, it's incredible. They still just want to have fun and go out like they did when they were teenagers and hear the music that they liked which defines their lives but happens to be all the way from here. So how crazy is that?

They just heard...people in the north of England working in industrial, working class towns with miserable jobs and a dreary, you know, environment, heard stuff from here that struck a chord with them for some reason. Because our music, these are people that, although they're working class, want, they want to be sophisticated, and to wear, like, a nice shirt and to look sharp or something. It's not like people here that might have a Harley or want to look tough or something. These people look tough in a different way by looking sharp. So just, it's very strange, it's completely different from our way. Something about the music still really speaks to them.

Motown, and the music we produced up here was more influenced by jazz and pop, whereas like Stax Records from Memphis, which people often pit against Motown and say, 'Oh, well, Motown's so poppy and I like Stax because it's earthy and raw.' But we were influenced by jazz and pop more than blues and gospel. Although blues and gospel is still part of it, we had more sophisticated arrangements, more complicated chords, our people were jazz guys that were playing under their heads. Because they could've gone to New York and made it in jazz like a lot of their peers did, but they stayed here and had a more reliable paycheck and just did sessions all the time, basically playing on what are considered to be pop records. But they're playing with such a skill level that teenagers in the garage or somebody else couldn't do what they did in terms of how complex the music truly is, and well made. So that's one of the reasons that a lot of it stands the time. But then the rougher copies of it stand the time just as well, too, like the Tomangoes that I mentioned, which is like cruder sounding than the Rolling Stones. And just very urgent like, you know, hardly two minutes long,

CCOOK: The original definition of punk.

BHALES: Because he's such a blast, it's not, Eddie Parker or the Tomangoes aren't too different from punk. They're just as urgent, and, you know, really get your blood pumping and you feel something from it.

00:44:11

CCOOK: Excellent, excellent. So, you grew up, where did you say you grew up?

BHALES: I grew up mostly in Wyandotte. That's where I graduated, went to high school there.

CCOOK: Okay, and then you went to Ann Arbor for a little while. And so, how did you decide to set up your record store kind of in the Cass Corridor area of Detroit?

BHALES: Well, when I first was able to move out of my parents' home, we went to Ann Arbor because that was more of a counter-cultural place at that time. It was still like the end of the hippie era, so you had all these crazy kids out there, that, their parents were hippies, they were maybe born in the '70's, and living in Ann Arbor had a great deal more freedom. You know, I think that growing up in Ann Arbor with hippie parents was way different than growing up in someplace like Wyandotte with normal parents, you know. So out there it was more wild, there were all these punks and hippies and just all this subculture back then. It was like quite a Grateful Dead kind of town, which, you can't even find a single trace of that any more. Back then it was quite different, and so, we're like, oh, you know, just admiring the Stooges and the MC5, and then current groups that were from there, like the Laughing Hyenas and stuff. It seemed like, 'Oh this is a very exciting place to be.'

Detroit had a good scene for punk music. But out there I thought, Oh we could live in a house with a bunch of people and have shows, which we did. We brought groups from all over the world to play there in different basements and stuff. Until it just became too risky with police, and getting tickets and stuff. It was no good anymore. It was fun when you were young. But it's not a good way to live the rest of your life. So after being out there for most of the '90's, I came here at the end of the '90's and was really glad that I did. Because Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti had kind of run their course

culturally and it was starting to change and there was just less interesting stuff happening musically.

CCOOK: Right. Whereas it was still kind of …

BHALES: Detroit was growing. I mean, not only were soulful house music and techno and things still doing fine, but there was also like a punk and rock and roll scene that was burgeoning with the Gold Dollar scene and the Magic Stick back then with groups like the White Stripes and The Go and Clone Defects and all these bands then that were kicking off, so that was fun as well.

CCOOK: So you said that you had a job at Wayne State for a bit?

BHALES: Uh huh. I was doing interviews like this (laughs) for the Department of Senior Citizens. To see if the seniors knew about the different programs that were available, and going door to door, knocking and talking to them asking if there was someone there over 65 I could speak to. But the whole time I was just thinking, 'The records are getting away!' I really wanted to have my own shop.

CCOOK: So how did you actually start the shop?

BHALES: Just by saving up the first month's rent and moving my own things in there. That was it. I had a partner named Lauren Bruyninga who was going to sell vintage stuff there but she went to real estate school at the same time and that took over. So, I wouldn't have been able to do it without her help, just on my own with no credit history, no business experience to speak of.

CCOOK: Right. And you probably had a lot of investment in the records themselves, correct?

BHALES: I guess the sweat equity of having worked in record stores, that's one of the perks, is that you get a better record collection.

CCOOK: Yeah, that's probably true.

BHALES: So I guess it was sweat equity, too.

CCOOK: Although you--

BHALES: And, hunting for them, just hunting for them over the years everywhere I went.

CCOOK: So you just started collecting records, or …

BHALES: From age, like 4 on up. I had my own, I have a picture of myself from 1979 where I've got my headphones on and I'm at my turntable and my spindle of, my spool of 45s is sitting right there. But it's always been a presence in my life.

CCOOK: So did you just sell straight from your collection, or …

BHALES: Yeah, I did. But I don't, I didn't regret it. I mean, I got better stuff in the end.

CCOOK: Right. So you sell something for 3 bucks--

BHALES: It's a gamble--

CCOOK: --and that's like 3 records for 1 buck that you can buy.

BHALES: Yeah! You just keep growing exponentially that way.

CCOOK: And certainly you seem to have plenty of them now.

BHALES: Yep. They just keep coming.

CCOOK: They just keep coming.

BHALES: We always have more records coming in, but I always say you can't eat them. I have to figure out how to try to sell them, too.

00:49:05

CCOOK: You have to sell some. So where do they come from? I mean, who, who, how do they find out about you, how do they bring…

BHALES: Word of mouth, newspaper advertisements. We've always tried making lots of different advertisements, whether it be stickers, or just giving out my card and talking to people, trying to take every phone call and really explain to people what we're looking for. Make that connection and tell them, 'No, I'm not looking for Michael Jackson. I want to find and look for names you don't know.' If you know every name in the stack, that's not a good stack. I'm always saying the same lines to people again and again. Just to try and make them understand, like, there's so much more music than what we're exposed to on the radio. It's ridiculous. You'd think there are only a hundred songs, a hundred rock songs, a hundred country songs, a hundred rap songs, and that's it, you know.

CCOOK: Yeah, you would think. You would think.

BHALES: And the jazz is boring. Classical is, too. I mean, we're so, it's like there, it could be so much better.

00:50:10

CCOOK: Right. So what makes, what draws you to the Cass Corridor area, specifically?

BHALES: Well, I mean, that would, well, it used to be a cultural center down there, you know. There was the Cass Corridor art movement, and you always had a lot of different venues and places down there, like Alvin's, for years. And Zoot's Coffee when I was growing up was an important place for, you know, it was a touchstone for lots of different music subcultures. So, 404 Willis and the TRUMBULLPLEX for punk. There were just always lots of more grass roots kind of places, you know, where it wasn't just your standard rock bar. But they were more adventurous in their programming, and the quality of the music was higher, so it was just always a place I was drawn to as soon as I was old enough to drive, I was going to...maybe even before, I was trying to go to shows there. They always happened. They were always from blues to punk to jazz. You know, anything you could think of, they had it down there. To the MC5 and Sun Ra playing in the Unitarian church together…

CCOOK: Oh wow!

BHALES: Just all kinds of incredible stuff happening over the years there.

CCOOK: That's pretty impressive!

BHALES: And then, you know, electronic music. Lots of different stuff that would be fascinating to people from around the world. You think, if you have a really broad mind about music, it's just, we were so lucky here! Stuff that happened in the last half of the past century.

CCOOK: Well, that is true. It's definitely true.

BHALES: To be on top of blues and rock, you know, and to have great punk, great electronic music, great classical music, our contribution to hip-hop, and to create, helping create techno, and electro music, too, so we had a big part in all that stuff.

CCOOK: Yeah. So, how do you think your business is uniquely suited to the Cass Corridor area?

BHALES: I don't know. And again we haven't been there for a while now. I was glad to finally leave that area last September, but it just seemed logical because, like I say, I was living and working there. Like, I lived in the same flat for ten years, where they had the Fourth Street Fair. Which was, the Fourth Street Fair was pretty chaotic. That was not a normal block party.

CCOOK: Yeah. (laughs)

BHALES: So, that kind of thing used to be more permissible. We used to have a party called Funk Night that we started doing in 1999, and it still occasionally happens and it's spawned a record label that's had over fifty releases now, all on 7 inch vinyl…

CCOOK: And you carry them, I assume?

BHALES: But that party went all night, at an art gallery, we would sometimes go until 6 in the morning and during the over nine years that I was associated with the party we never had a problem with the police. I only saw one fight that was quickly broken up and there were people there, you know, partying until 6 or 7 in the morning. Sometimes hundreds of people. We never had any problem. I mean, to do that when there are so many cars and everything and be undetected or kind of let alone by the authorities, it was incredible. But now you couldn't do something like that. So it doesn't draw me to that area. It makes me say well, we were lucky that we were there when they were. It's kind of ruined now. It's not fun to go there any more. There's not, you don't have any young, creative people moving there because it's cheap. You have all these people moving there that, you know, from other places because they read that it was cool. So it changes the fabric of the neighborhood…

CCOOK: the gentrification…

BHALES: …the gentrification of it. But it just changes the whole feeling of it, and the whole purpose of the neighborhood. So the Cass Corridor that I grew up seeing in the last century doesn't exist anymore. It's been changed and now you'd have to seek out entertainment someplace else.

00:54:31

CCOOK: Yeah, yeah. Exactly. That's too bad. So, you've been involved in the music scene in Detroit for a while now through records and through music itself. How has the scene evolved since you've been involved with it?

BHALES: I don't know. I saw rock and roll get really, really huge and recede during my lifetime. Like, there was a point where it seemed like rock was kind of dead when punk had gotten too metal and rock and roll just wasn't in its healthy state, but it almost kind of got back to its roots in a good way, during the late '90's, from groups like the Gories taking it and stripping it back down to basics, and all of the groups that kind of came in their wake, like the Henchmen, and then so many things later, there were just always good people keeping that alive here. So we, it's definitely one of the better rock and roll towns in the world. So, and then, it's been interesting learning, being a late comer to techno music and to house music, not really...hearing that stuff growing up, but not really even realizing or

knowing what a lot of it was just by how good the radio was then, and hearing it on Electrifying Mojo and on The Wizard you might not even know what some of these songs are called until years later.

CCOOK: That's true.

BHALES: But you know the music. But just realizing, like, oh, we're in a really interesting position here, and, you know, Detroit's very cutting edge and very relevant in a contemporary way worldwide, like our DJs and producers from here, like Andreas, Moodymann, Theo Parrish, Rick Wilhite, you know, a lot of these people, and younger people like Kyle Hall and Jay Daniel, they all have very successful careers where they get to go all around the world, you know, playing their music and creating new records that are interesting in a contemporary way. It's good to know that there's something really healthy and vibrant and right now happening that's accessible. So, seeing that, going from not knowing much about it but learning about it, it's been fun and interesting. I don't know. There's great stuff happening like that.

CCOOK: Wonderful.

BHALES: Just realize that these kinds of music might go into hibernation, but they don't die. Like blues. You can still go on a Sunday to the Carpet House on Frederick and St. Aubin, and hear the best raw, like, talented, the heart-felt local blues that you could find anywhere in America. Now that Maxwell Street Flea Market is no longer in Chicago, what they have there is very, very real. So, I don't know. Just, the more you study it, the more you realize that there are three different things going on each night that could all be good and--

CCOOK: Right. You have to choose.

BHALES: --we're lucky to have them. Yeah.

00:57:44

CCOOK: Great. Well, what would you like people to know about the music scene in Detroit that they might not be aware of?

BHALES: I mean, honestly, I'm not, at this point that immersed in it. Because I work six days a week and I study the past. So, I would be the wrong person to ask, in a way. I mean, I can tell you if you want to know what's going on that's good, you could pay attention to FIT DISTRIBUTION and the records that FIT releases and distributes are always really high quality as far as electronic and dance music goes. But how to keep your pulse on what young bands are good with rock and punk, it would involve too many bars and late nights and stuff that I can't do anymore because--

CCOOK: You've gotten past that.

BHALES: --I like to wake up early. Yeah, I'll go out if I have a gig, but I'm not trying, I want to behave and be able to keep both stores functioning. So it's easy to be grumpy with too many late nights, so I don't go out a ton to see young bands now. It's hard to say.

00:58:57

CCOOK: So how many gigs do you usually do in the course of a month, or whatever?

BHALES: I might only have two myself, but that's about enough at this point. I'll go see a friend if they're performing, or I'll go see a lot of the more avant-garde—they always have nice jazz and avant-garde stuff at Trinosophes. That's a really, really great place to hear a lot of interesting stuff from around the world. So I'll go to things there or at the Michigan Underground Group, or MUG, which is ground zero for Wolf Eyes and kind of like the noise and experimental music in Michigan, I'll go see what they're doing, what's happening over there.

CCOOK: And similarly, you kind of answered this question, but, what would you like people to know about what you remember of the Cass Corridor area of Detroit that they might not have been aware of?

BHALES: I don't know. Just, bigger isn't always better. Like, Zoot's was a very, very special place in the '90's, because this was a house that was owned by Ervin Monroe, the flautist and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. It was a pretty progressive pair, and I would say his kids were always musically active in different groups and Zoot's, they had everything there,

so many different kinds of music, and doing film and it was a special place because it was so intimate. So I would say, like, if new venues are to emerge, to be like the biggest or most polished place isn't necessarily important. But if you create a place that feels like home to people, that's even more special. So you'd go there even just to see what was happening. It was always just a good place and you could rely on the quality. So, I miss that, but I think something like that could be really valuable. If we had a cafe culture like some places did, it would really help the music scene in a lot of ways. We could use far more cafes than we have, and they would all make it if they were good.

CCOOK: Right, and they could all have live music.

BHALES: It would be awesome!

CCOOK: Right.

BHALES: There are a lot of people around who could use the work. And people want the entertainment and the coffee. It's a winner.

CCOOK: I'm a college student there; I could definitely drink some coffee.

BHALES: There you go.

CCOOK: Anything you would like to add, anything that I haven't come up with in my questions or that you'd like to….

BHALES: If you'd like to hear more of the music that I'm talking about, I'll continue to add more at our website, PeoplesDetroit.com. If you click on the drop down menu, there's a section for music where you can hear mixes I've prepared, of a lot of obscure stuff, a lot of it Michigan-related, so you could definitely do more listening on there if you felt like it. And please continue to watch for the website and museum and hopefully radio station as they continue to grow and emerge.

CCOOK: Excellent! Well, thank you very much for your time.

BHALES: Thank you.

CCOOK: I've really appreciated it, and I know you're a very busy guy.

BHALES: Thanks.

CCOOK: Have a wonderful wedding.

BHALES: Thank you. Appreciate it.

CCOOK: Thank you very much.

01:02:20

Bibliography and Footnote Citation Forms

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