

LABEL PROFILE

## Navigating the Depths of D.C. Label Atlantic Rhythms

By [Erin Margaret Day](#) · February 23, 2021

When Sean Peoples' experimental pop label, [Sockets Records](#), shut down in early 2013, he was eager to take a break. The reprieve ended up being short-lived, however, as a confluence of personal and professional realizations led him to start laying the groundwork for what would become his next label, D.C.-based Atlantic Rhythms.

The first was that Peoples had begun to listen to music differently. Having just lost both of his parents to cancer, Peoples wanted to submerge himself in healing music; the idea of sound healing and tuning the mind and body for repair held a very strong resonance. He also really wanted to collaborate with his friend, Nick Apice, "to build something that could explore patterns, color, and graphic identity." With a renewed sense of purpose and an interest in continuing to support the work of the collaborative community of independent artists he'd met through Sockets, Peoples founded Atlantic Rhythms in 2015.

While the label is headquartered in DC, the name comes from coastal New Jersey, a setting that made a deep impression on Peoples growing up. "The ocean, to me, is a place that envelops the senses: sight, sound, smell, touch," he says. "The rhythms of the tide and the life that depends on the natural balance of those rhythms is fascinating. Plus, salt water has healing properties—it serves as an anti-infective and can decrease inflammation, so it made sense to me to find a way to capture that."

What music is released on Atlantic Rhythms is not only determined by Peoples and Apice's listening habits, but also by its listeners—many artists on the label submit their work as a result of hearing something released on the label. “We’re always listening to new music, and that’s the best,” Peoples says. “There’s so much music! Luckily, we have so many long standing relationships with artists and musicians and building a community around that is a huge part of how we determine releasing music.”

One such artist is Luke Stewart. Early on in his work as an active musician in DC, he met Peoples at one of the first Sonic Circuits festivals he attended. “He was playing guitar with a laptop and I loved his music and sensibility,” Stewart recalls. “At the time, I was so enamored by the idea that there was a deep and thriving community of experimental musicians in DC, and Sean’s music was one I remember gravitating towards, [but] he soon identified more as a person who wanted to help facilitate the music [through running a] record label.”

“For DC [in that era], Sockets was definitely a movement that included some of the most cutting-edge music in DC, coalesced around a specific community of left-leaning listeners,” says Stewart, whose band, [Laughing Man](#), released a cassette on Sockets. “Not just DC either; he also released early material for [many] key musical outfits in the experimental indie underground in general.”

Stewart feels strongly that Sockets was successful in amplifying “some specific frequencies of indie movements at the time that have had important implications on subsequent movements in DIY music culture,” particularly in respect to genre-free forms of music. Despite Sockets’ focus on a wide swath of experimental music, Peoples still felt confined by genre and frustrated when attempting to define new sounds as they emerged. Atlantic Rhythms moves beyond this obstacle by focusing on what music does rather than what music is. “Instead of focusing on genre, which feels very prescriptive, I wanted to explore the connective tissue in the music I loved, which was an ineffable deepness,” says Peoples. “My interest in the work of Pauline Oliveros, namely her ‘Sonic Meditations’ and ideas around deep listening, can’t be overstated.”

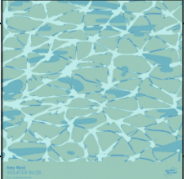
Sustainability is another consideration for Atlantic Rhythms, where the validation conferred by physical media is balanced with the knowledge that they are producing work for smaller audiences, which is why the label mainly releases music digitally and on cassette. Doing limited editions helps them lessen their environmental impact and avoid putting more copies into the world than necessary. Fortunately for listeners, Atlantic Rhythms will often reissue releases when demand exceeds expectation. “Vinyl is prohibitively expensive if your audience is small,” says Peoples. “[But] there’s a thriving cassette underground and the enthusiasm of that is vital to building independent musical communities. In so many ways, the medium is the message to tap and connect with that spirit.”

Ultimately, Atlantic Rhythms exists to support and affirm the deep connection between underground artists and the people who listen to them. As ambient composer Amy Reid puts it: “Listening to independent music and being an independent musician is intentional on both ends...and amplifies the uniqueness that you carry as a creator. It’s easy to compare yourself to other artists, and it’s important to be reminded that not fitting into an easily described box is alright. Understanding that, throughout my music-making lifetime, I’ve been motivated to hold space for other independent artists.”

Peoples agrees. “We’re only here because of our artists,” he says. “Full stop. Without them, we would be an idea. I’m truly grateful for their trust and art. I’m proud that we’ve worked with so many amazing people.”

Below, the artists of Atlantic Rhythms walk us through the inspirations and methods behind their notable releases.

**Amy Reid**  
*Isolated Bliss*

		<b>Isolated Bliss</b> by Amy Reid	BUY
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Atlantic Rhythms reached out to Amy Reid about making an ambient album right as she was embarking on a new chapter in her life, living in a dorm on an island off the coast of Maine. She knew she wanted to make an album, but one that wouldn't be as vocal-heavy as her first record, *Hirsuit*. "Hiking became a huge part of my daily routine in connecting with the island and I started taking field recordings of different places: shores, the forest, small concerts in the cafe, and interacting with people," Amy details. "I started combining these field recordings with compositions I would make when I got off of work from waiting tables. The album became a way to cope with missing everyone I knew, feeling isolated, and finding new hope and beginnings." Amy Reid engages music as both a listener and as a composer as a calming force with which to locate a center-point, a slowness encompassing enough to arrest the endless loop of anxiety momentarily.