



Boilen came up with the show after receiving letters from people who wanted to know more about the instrumental interludes being played on the network's evening newscast, *All Things Considered*, which Boilen still directs. Boilen quickly realized that people wanted a place to discover new music, so he moved away from playing instrumentals in favor of bringing the songs of talented, obscure artists to the nation's ears.

Boilen and his staff receive 200-300 albums each week for possible inclusion on the show. "I think the thing I try hardest to do is to come to all the music honestly," he says. Avoiding the mountains of press kits that accompany the barrage of releases, he listens fairly blindfolded—often not even knowing which CD he's listening to.

"[I listen to the albums] with a complete open ear just trying to see if [the music] strikes me. What is a fresh sound? Who the heck knows? But I look for something that has a vitality, that has a sense of creativity to it, maybe that's breaking new bounds—or something that just feels great. For the most part, we try to find something that's finding new ways to make music out of the same 12 notes everybody else has to deal with. Something inspiring."

Boilen occasionally does play well-known artists, but he admits there's little point in playing something people can hear "in umpteen-thousand other places" such as the latest U2 album. "If we're going to choose 10 songs every week, let it be Super XX Man—something that few [other shows] are going to play."

It's often hard to tell how much of the buzz generated by featured artists can be attributed directly to exposure from the show, but *ASC* is certainly cutting-edge enough to keep drawing people who are in search of new sounds. Boilen says his quest for musicians trying new and inspired approaches can be traced back to experiencing the British Invasion as a teen. The groundbreaking changes in music brought about by The

ALL SONGS CONSIDERED? NPR'S BOB BOILEN TAKES HIS BEST SHOT

BY AMANDA
LEFF

Sufjan Stevens, Norah Jones, The Be Good Tanyas—NPR's *All Songs Considered* backed them before many had even heard the names. This weekly online music program, which debuted in January 2000, features around 10 songs from relatively unknown artists, all of whom are hand-selected by host Bob Boilen.

EARS WE TRUST: JOHN RICHARDS (KEXP SEATTLE)



» **1. PETER BJORN AND JOHN** *Writer's Block* Early pick for album of the year.

» **2. THE BLAKES** *The Blakes* The best band in Seattle right now, independent or signed—The Blakes take that swaggering Strokes sound and attitude and make it their own. Early pick for best undiscovered band.

» **3. THE FRATELLIS** *Costello Music* Scottish band debuts with a powerful punch of punk, ska and pop. Early pick for catchiest record of 2007.

» **4. ALBERT HAMMOND JR.** *Yours to Keep* The Strokes guitarist puts out an album even better than The Strokes' last release. While the band remains on hiatus, we still have Albert Hammond to continue down the road The Strokes have traveled. Early pick for side project of the year.

» **5. RAY** *Daylight in the Darkroom* You like Tindersticks? How about Nick Cave or Leonard Cohen? Good. Then go find the new Rays release. Early pick for band that reminds me of the Tindersticks, Nick Cave and/or Leonard Cohen.

JOHN RICHARDS IS HOST OF THE MORNING SHOW AND ASSOCIATE PROGRAM DIRECTOR FOR SEATTLE'S 90.3 FM KEXP. KEXP.ORG, BOTH LIVE AND ON DEMAND.

Beatles and The Rolling Stones between 1965 and 1968 “completely affected what I want to hear and what I’ve come to expect in music,” Boilen says.

His self-proclaimed high musical standards explain why he seeks growth and new challenges on follow-up albums from his favorite debut artists, where “they find something in themselves that they hadn’t found in themselves in their last record.”

SONGS OF HIS OWN

Boilen uses this same aesthetic in his own electronic musical endeavors, which began when he joined a punk-rock band in 1979. “[I] really wanted to sweep decks clear and try to create something that had never been heard or done before.”

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Today, Boilen still strives to break ground in his own music. With the aid of MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface), which allows computers and synthesizers to communicate, Boilen makes interesting sounds despite his lack of traditional technique. “The fact that I technically can’t play a keyboard very well, and I’m really—other than chords and rhythm—not all that great at guitar, I can [still] use the technology at hand to discover sounds and make music. I understand what I like. [Sometimes] I just don’t know how to get there.”

Using his home studio, Boilen makes unique music he takes pride in. As an electronic musician, he’s inspired by the discovery processes of Brian Eno and John Cage. “It wasn’t about entertainment—it was about finding something interesting and fine-tuning when you found it,” Boilen says. He describes his creative process as finding fascinating rhythms and textures and enhancing them with the use of technology. “It’s like sculpting. You take this big block and find [the beauty within].”



Shara Worden

MY BRIGHTEST, REMIXED DIAMOND

Exploring territory usually reserved for high-profile postmodern shape-shifters like Beck, My Brightest Diamond’s Shara Worden is following her well-received debut *Bring Me The Workhorse* with an electronic remix disc, *Tear It Down*. The album features 13 diverse re-imaginings of *Workhorse* tracks, from the straight-ahead beats of Alias’ “Golden Star” to the Siamese Sisters’ ambient instrumental take on “The Good and The Bad Guy.” “I’m horrible with machines,” Worden confesses to *Paste*. “I saw it as another form of apprenticeship, a way for me to learn something I could not see or hear previously. If I would have micromanaged, then it would have gotten in the way of that process. However, it wasn’t only for my academic side; I also wanted some dance music!” *Reid Davis*



HOW HE GOT THERE

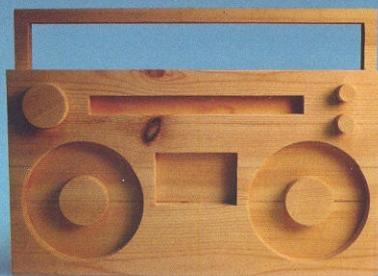
It’s often said that persistence is key when looking for opportunities; This a concept to which Bob Boilen is no stranger. After quitting a job in television, Boilen began showing up at NPR every day looking for work. “I hoped I wasn’t a pest,” he says, “but I had a love of radio—that was at the heart of it.” His passion for it began early—as a child he constantly listened to Washington, D.C., radio. “It was a big part of my world.”

After several weeks, Boilen was hired on a temporary basis assisting with *All Things Considered*, the network’s award-winning evening newscast. Within a year, he was the director. Boilen modestly attributes his success to being in the right place at the right time. When he started, Marika Partridge was director of ATC. She selected Boilen as her replacement when she left the show for a year to work on a new project for NPR. “She saw in me the kind of person who could direct a radio show,” says Boilen. “[In order to do this], you need to be calm. You need to be able to do many things at the same time. You need to be good at math. You need to be clear-headed. But what she saw in me that you can’t teach was my love of music and an understanding of what music can do for a radio show and a story.” Today, Boilen and Partridge remain friends. “[She] saw in me something I didn’t know I had—and I’m totally grateful.”

With his work at NPR and his music, it’s hard to imagine Boilen having spare time to casually listen to albums when not researching for the show. “Recreational listening just doesn’t happen like it used to,” he concurs. “I don’t sit down for a couple of hours like I had done as a teenager—just put on a record and sit and listen. Listening to the same album repeatedly, which is often where you find the magic in music, happens less for me because I’m just trying to pick up the next CD in the pile.” Asking Boilen what music he’s currently digging is rather anticlimactic if you’ve heard the most recent episodes of *ASC*. “If you listen to the show, that’s what I’m listening to a lot of. Those are the records that I fall for—and I just want to pass them on to somebody else.”

ASC is available at NPR.org/programs/asc and through the *iTunes Music Store*. Boilen’s music is online at BobBoilen.info.

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