

Has Anyone Ever Told You?



First of all, please tell us who you are.

Has Anyone Ever Told You? from Austin, Texas. Owned and operated by Chris Boehk and Jennifer Perkins out of our spare bedroom. We are assisted by Lucy, our dog, and Georgie, our cat.

When did your label start? (Don't panic; these questions will become more interesting soon. We're catering to the readers here.)

My fiancée, Jennifer, and I started the label about two years in the summer of 2000. We started it to put out a CD by a band I was in at the time, but that fell through, so we put together a split 7" with The Search for Saturnalia (another band I was in) and Egon and the rest is history.

Let's go on with the predictable stuff. How did you come up with your label's name? What other names did you consider?

Actually, this is a pretty cool little story. Let me preface it by saying that Jennifer has had people tell her many times that she looks like Molly Ringwald, ever since she's been a kid. I remember us discussing this at about the same time we began discussing starting a record label, although we didn't put the two topics together at that time. One night we went to a coffee place here in Austin. On the way there, we were throwing names for our new label back and forth. We still hadn't decided when we ordered our coffees. After giving us the change, the girl behind the register, looking at Jennifer, asked, "Has anyone ever told you you look like Molly Ringwald?" We giggled a little bit, and went outside to continue the name game. One of us blurted out, "Let's call it 'Has Anyone Ever Told You?!'" and that was it. No doubts about the name. We knew it was perfect. So, when it came time to put out our first release and we needed a catalog number, we opted for "MR-01" -- MR meaning "Molly Ringwald".

Do you have a slogan or tag line? If so, what is it? We eat that shit up.

Not really, but type "lovebirds" into Yahoo or another search engine, and it'll pull up our label. Here's what our link description is/was: "Record label from Austin, Texas, run by two lovebirds who want to put out good music by their friends." We still get a lot of people who come to the site because they've typed "lovebirds" into a search engine.

Every label seems to have horror stories about would-be signees sending godawful, inappropriate demos, e-mailing MP3s or generally embarrassing themselves. Please share some of yours!

Yes, we've gotten our share of stuff that we didn't think was very good. Probably the best thing is getting several emails from an all-girl non group akin to the Spice Girls that was from Ohio or

getting several emails from an all-girl pop group akin to the Spice Girls that was from Ohio or something. These girls were about 15 and they had names like "Fire", "Wind", "Earth", etc. It was pretty funny and I wish I could remember the name. Their "manager", better known as "Dad" to one of them I'm sure, kept sending us emails about their amazing performances and tours. The downside to doing a label is that we have received several very good things, things we would have liked to put out, but we just can't because of money and time constraints.

What does your label do that no-one else does? What's your niche, in other words?

I think, and I'm going to toot our horn on this one, that we do more promotion than most labels out there. We handle everything on our own. We have never hired a press agent or anything like that. I think the farthest we've gone is to have a radio company mail CDs for us, because they could do it cheaper. We do all the mailing to zines, design and take out all the ads, build and maintain the site, promote the shows, promote the tours, do the radio follow-up, and on and on and on. Since we don't have a lot of money, we make up for it by busting our asses and going the extra mile. This is a DIY label; always has been, always will be.

What do you know now that you wish you'd known when your label started? What would you do differently?

More advertising and we would have started sending to more zines off the bat. It's taken a long time to build up the mailout list. At first, we'd just send to zines that we thought of or saw in the bookstore or online. We didn't do a lot of research. And even though I don't listen to the radio, I realize it's important to try and get radio stations to play your stuff. I think radio is really important too, something we didn't really pay attention to until a release or two ago.

When it comes to dealing with bands, do you favor contracts or handshakes?

Handshakes are fine. Or, for the out-of-towners, a phone call has sufficed. We are not out to rip anybody off, we're in this because we love it. If bands can't take our word, or if we can't take theirs, then we've failed and we have no reason to be doing business.

Tell us, about the most painful lesson you've learned -- business, poor judgement, watch your footing on the stairs, whatever -- since the label started.

The most painful lesson I've learned, and this seems painfully pessimistic and depressing, is that nobody gives a shit. We've had to grow a really thick skin over time to take the rejections and the disappointments. The good things are good, but the bad things suck really bad. It sucks when you work your ass off for nothing. No recognition, no pat on the back, no thanks, no nothing!

Now, to cheer everyone up again, tell us about something good -- the event (or whatever) that made you realize that your label would be a long-term concern rather than a glorified hobby.

There wasn't really an event or occasion that made us decide that we would keep on going with it. We like to put out good music by our friends. As long as our friends keep making music and we have the money and most importantly, we keep having FUN, we'll keep on keepin' on. When any of these things ceases, so will the label.

If you could pay half the rent you currently pay for office space (if you have it), or have twice the space for the same amount of money, which would you choose?

Twice the amount of space. We always need more room. She's gonna kill me, but this is Jennifer's fault; you could put all of my belongings in a shoebox.

An independent label is, like any other operation, a business. What day-to-day aspects of business most get in the way of the fun parts of the job?

Money. That's the worst part. There's never enough coming in and too much going out. Another crappy thing is dealing with other people's schedules and flakiness. It makes me want to scream sometimes.

How has your attitude toward music -- buying it, listening to it, seeing it -- changed since you've been associated with your label?

My attitude has definitely changed. I buy less music and I go out to see fewer bands (although I think is more because of my being in a band). I've become more jaded, bitter, and most of all, jealous. I know that's stupid and childish, but why should someone else get the recognition that I deserve? I've worked just as hard, if not harder, as so-and-so, and they've sold more stuff than I have and get more attention. It's not fair. Boo-hoo.

What are the secret perks of operating an independent label?

There aren't any. And if you think I'm lying, start one for yourself. It's tough, expensive and like I said before, it's a pretty thankless job. I know that's negative, but that's how I feel at the moment. You'll get more perks if you're in a band than if you run a label. Take it from me, I do both.

We know you're proud of all of your bands, but who has been your proudest signing/biggest find? (If diplomacy prevents you from answering this with anything other than "I'm proud of all of our bands", we understand.)

The biggest signing is Deathray Davies, they are the biggest band and have sold the most product. My personal favorite is Egon. Victor is a great songwriter -- he's humble and hardworking. Behind The Curtain is my favorite CD on the label.

Of the artists/bands on your label...

a) Who would you most want on your side in a bar brawl?

Dewey Defeats Truman. Both James (bass) and Scott (drummer) are BIG guys, like linebackers. I know that they could do some damage. Don't fuck with them.

b) Who is most likely to get hopelessly lost while on tour?

Egon. When Egon stayed at our house for SXSW, they stayed for two nights. On the second night, they went their own way for the day, and ended up driving around the streets of Austin for a couple of hours looking for our house. They got to our house at 4:00 a.m., I think. They had called in the middle of the night to ask for directions, but we were asleep and didn't hear the phone.

c) Who is most likely to record a two-disc concept album about elves?

The Deathray Davies. John and Co. have more songs than you can shake a stick at. Each of their full-lengths has something like 16 songs or something. John is a very prolific, talented guy and I have no doubt that he could put together something like that.

d) Who is most likely to be featured in Tiger Beat?

We Talked About Murder. Matt's (drummer) got the boyish good looks and the sleeve tattoos, Joey's (guitar) tall and got the baby blues, Rick's (guitar) the Latin lover and the snappy dresser, and me (bass), well, let's just say that I'm quite the Casanova

Casanova.

e) Who is most likely to have a song in a Gap commercial?

Dewey Defeats Truman. I think their upbeat jams would make anybody run right out and buy a pair of khaki shorts.

What's the most annoying/inaccurate preconception that people have about your label?

That people think it's bigger than it really is and that we've got an infinite supply of cash at our disposal. We get resumes from people about internships, we get people asking if we're still doing the label if it's been two months since our last release. It's just kind of funny to see people's reactions when we tell them how big (or small) it really is and how much money we make (or don't make).

If you were given \$10,000 to create a tchotchke/dooickey/promotional item to raise awareness of one of your upcoming albums, what would you make? And for which album?

Now Victor (of Egon) is going to kill me for this one, but I think a line of men's and women's underwear that had "Behind the Curtain" printed on the front would be awesome!!

Which three of your releases, taken as a group, best represent your label's philosophy?

I think that the Our Own Somewhere CD embodies the label's philosophy best. I recorded it myself, played all of the instruments myself, and made the covers myself. I did it just to see if I could do it. Same goes for the label. We started this just to do it, just to get stuff out there, to be involved and give something back. The other two releases would probably be The Search for Saturnalia's Four Letters and Egon's Phonetic Disasters, because both of those releases took the bands a long time to put together and both bands went through line-up changes right before or during recording. You have to deal with what life gives you, you have to cope and figure out different ways of doing stuff, but you don't give up and throw in the towel.

If you had the funds and inventory to give just one of your releases to everyone in America, which would it be?

It would have to be the We Talked About Murder CDEP, for the simple reason that it's my band and I want people to know about us. I think we're a pretty good band.

You've been given the chance to take another label's entire roster and do with it as you please. Whose acts do you grab, and which bands particularly attracted you?

The label I would want would probably be SST back in their prime. Dinosaur Jr., Sonic Youth, Firehose, Hüsker Dü, and The Minutemen are still some of my favorite bands today, and they've had incredible influence on me personally.

We asked the previous question to a whole bunch of labels. Which of them, if any, named your label's roster as their most-wanted list?

Probably all of them. We know that people are jealous of us and our greatness. It's hard to be so good and be so humble at the same time.

Who would win in a fight -- ninjas or pirates?

Ninjas. That's easy. Ninjas have swords, throwing stars, and are proficient in the martial arts. Pirates, on the other hand, have scurvy, wooden legs, and parrots on their shoulders.

How long has your label had a website? How has it changed over the years? How has it, and the internet in general, affected the way you do business? (This is a boring question that everyone asks, so please try to come up with an original and unusual answer!)

We've had a website since the beginning. We actually had the website up before we even had a release. It was pretty rough when we started, but with the help of friends, and good ol' fashioned elbow grease, we put together what we have today. Neither Jennifer nor I knew anything about web design so we asked a million and one questions (thanks everybody!). You can't do without the Internet and having a website. Sales wouldn't be what they were without our website and the ability to take credit cards. More people know about our label and bands because of the site. Then there's the advantages of email and mp3s. The Internet's benefits are immeasurable. I personally don't like the Internet very much, nor do I like updating the page. It's more of a necessary evil for me personally, but Jennifer likes to be on the Internet and she stays on top of stuff.

What's your attitude toward MP3s? How (if at all) has it changed over the last few years?

I think they're okay. I don't have a problem with them. I think they're a good way to sample someone's music and decide if you want to buy something. Plus it's a great promotional tool. What I don't like is when you find entire albums that have been turned into mp3s so that people don't have to buy the record -- that's not fair to the label or the band (Yeah, I'm a Metallica sympathizer, you poor, cheated consumers.).

Would you sign a purely studio-based band? Why or why not? (And if you already have, how has it worked out for you?)

Depends on who was in the band. If it was a band that contained one or more well-known people, then yes, because it would sell based on that alone. If it was a band of regular joes, then no, they would have to be a live and touring band. You would be surprised how many people think it's not really necessary to get out there and play in front of a live audience.

The most surprising change in music in the last ten years has been...?

It would have to be people's patience, and not just with music. By that, I mean, with the Internet and digital technology becoming more and more advanced and part of our lives, people are getting used to getting things so much faster now. With music in particular, the attitude has become "if it's not on a convenient little disc, or better yet, a computer file that I can download, then I don't want it."

How many label profiles have you responded to before this one? Don't they suck?

This is only the second one, and we're flattered that you've asked. These are good questions. This is one of those little recognition things that we don't get very often. This is a payoff, a thank you, and they are few and far between. For this, we thank you.

I have \$5000 in cash sitting on the desk in front of me. I could use it as seed money for a record label or spend a few months roughing it in Europe. Which should I do, and why?

You should go to Europe. \$5,000 isn't much money to get a record label started proper, but I'll bet you could have a lot of fun with \$5,000 on vacation. We've had fun doing this label, and we've learned a lot, but it's hard work and right now a vacation in Europe sounds pretty damn good.

-- Questions by Justin Kownacki and George Zahora