



Extending out from its hardcore roots, JADE TREE records has quietly—well, not that quietly—become one of indie rock's hottest labels. Not bad for a couple of punks. BY BRIAN M. RAFTERY

Branch Managers



BOY POWER [1] Jade Tree founders Walters and Owen; [2] Jets to Brazil; [3] Pedro the Lion



whom were running their own labels (Owen in D.C., Walters in Delaware), decided to join forces and extend their musical interests beyond just hardcore. While Jade Tree's earliest releases didn't extend *too* far, the label's roster, now eight bands strong, has expanded to include near-jazz instrumentals (Euphone) and somber balladry (Pedro the Lion), while still churning out high-machismo punk (The Explosion). "We wanted to do something rooted in punk, but not be pigeonholed," says Owen.

But the label hasn't escaped pigeonholing altogether, and is often tagged as specializing in "emo," the aggressive-but-introspective punk style served up by the likes of Fugazi. "I do roll my eyes [at the "emo" description], but at the same time, emo is where we came from," says Walters. "But it's become this ridiculous tag to describe anything that's emotional."

But even as Jade Tree attempts to move beyond punk's perceived limitations—both musical and professional—Owen and Walters remain firmly grounded in punk's do-it-yourself aesthetic. They are as hands-on as possible, with Walters handling lawyers and accountants, while Owen works on advertising and promotion. Still, autonomy can be a struggle when a band like The Promise Ring is high profile enough to merit major-label attention or a cohosting slot on *120 Minutes*.

LISTEN UP, MORRISSEY. NOW THAT you're officially label-less (and no doubt missing out on all the cushy perks, hefty advances, and other extravagances a major can provide), there are two guys from Delaware—yep, Delaware—who would love to put out your next record.

Of course, to Jade Tree records, landing a star on par with the ex-Smiths frontman may be just two punk rockers' pipe dream—"It's been our little

joke for a while," says cofounder Tim Owen, 28—but it's not that far-fetched. After all, Jade Tree has become one of the country's hottest small-scale indie-rock labels. "There's a definite name recognition with Jade Tree," says Matt Swagler, a music director at Brown University's WBSR. "You can more or less count on the stuff coming out of [there] to be cutting edge."

Jade Tree was formed in 1990 after Owen and Darren Walters, 29, both of