



Red Hot Chili Peppers

DUB NARCOTIC SOUND SYSTEM

The String Cheese Incident

alanis morissette

AQUA

Courtesy of Warner Bros.

Courtesy of K Records

Courtesy of Sci-Fidelity Records

Courtesy of Maverick Record Company

Courtesy of MCA Records

# DIAGNOSIS LITTLE FISH IN A POND



Courtesy of Rumblefish Records

Kevin McKinely of 16 Second Hum plays bass at a recent Wild Duck Music Hall performance. The band is a recent addition to the Rumblefish line-up.

Record labels exist in a musical world that's more competitive every day

By Rory Carroll  
Oregon Daily Emerald

Stephen Malkmus, lead singer of Pavement, put it best when he sang, "Music seems crazy, bands start up, each and every day." But today, it seems like there's a new record company tossing their hat in the ring every day, too.

Corporate record labels, independent record labels and on-line record companies are all vying to make their artist achieve success or "break big." Since the dawn of major and minor, or 'indie', labels, there has been a kind of David-and-Goliath rift between the two.

Although all record companies are ultimately interested in sales, it has long been thought that the philosophies are different.

### Major or minor?

Ben Goldberg has been on both sides of the record label fence. He worked for a year and a half at Lava Records, a subsidiary label under major label Atlantic Records. He later took a job in promotion and general office management at New York's reputable indie label Matador Records.

Although he wasn't at Matador when the company began in 1989, he said that the intention was to create a label that was artist-friendly and had a provocative assortment of music on it from different bands. He said Matador is interested in bands that don't necessarily have the potential for immediate commercial success, but have an uncompromising musical integrity.

"That's what I feel the label has become," Goldberg said.

But there is an array of independent labels, and their goals are often very different. Not all indie labels have adopted Matador's

dedication to diversity. Some labels focus on chronicling a specific genre of music. Dischord Records, for example, has always had the goal of cataloging the Washington, D.C., punk rock scene.

"Some labels just look to seek an identity with a certain style of music and really become known for being experts and leaders in that genre," Goldberg said. "And then there are other independent labels that love to become part of the huge conglomerate, love to join to major labels."

Despite their differences, major and minor labels alike are interested in breaking their bands and selling records. But some labels are not so successful, despite starting with a large budget. Zero Hour Records is an example of a label that began with much capital, but failed after not being able to break any of their artists.

"Making a band break big is often very difficult to do," Goldberg said.

Other labels, like Olympia's K Records, started out with very little money but eventually grew to become a prominent Northwest label, launching now-national acts like Built to Spill and Modest Mouse.

"They're built to catalog their scene really well," Goldberg said. "They've been able to have successes with their releases and use that money to fuel more releases."

Kill Rock Stars is another independent Northwest label that has achieved success. Olympia-based trio Sleater-Kinney released "All Hands on the Bad One" on the Kill Rock Stars label Tuesday. The band's records have all been critically acclaimed, including their latest album.

Sleater-Kinney frontwoman Corin Tucker said that she is glad that her band is on an independent label instead of a major one.

"From what I know of most of the major labels, they're in really sad shape," Tucker said. "It just

seems like a really bad time to be on a major label. You don't know whether or not you're going to get dropped or what's going on, or whether the label is going to get bought by someone else. I think we're feeling really fortunate that we've made the decisions that we have and that we're on Kill Rock Stars."

Tucker said that knowing everyone at the label, as well as setting goals with them, leads to a sense of comfort they don't want to part with.

But Deb Bernadini, a publicist at Warner Brothers Records for nearly 11 years, said that if major labels occasionally swallow up bands, it's usually an accident.

"Not every band succeeds," she said.

She added that the only difference most bands find when working for a major label is the amount of money that the label has to support their artist with. Although Warner Brothers is a giant company that deals with movies, books and films, all of the divisions are kept separate. Bernadini said her office runs smoothly and not unlike an independent label, and added that Warner Brothers has a good relationship with many independent labels.

Musician Elliott Smith, who moved from Kill Rock Stars to major label DreamWorks, recently told The Rocket that he has benefited from the new direction of his career.

"I'm happy with certain things about it. Like the fact that I have access to more sonic possibilities that I couldn't have had before. I could never afford to hire an orchestra before," Smith said [The Rocket, 4/28/00].

But Paul Anthony, the mastermind behind Eugene's digital indie label Rumblefish, echoes Tucker's sentiments about major labels.

He said Rumblefish is dedicat-

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ATARI TEENAGE RIOT

16 Second Hum

'N SYNC

Curtis Salgado

Courtesy of Atlantic Records

Courtesy of Digital Hardcore Records

Courtesy of Rumblefish Records

Courtesy of RCA Records

Courtesy of Shanachie

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