

# Labels

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ed to close relationship between the artists and the label, and major labels have lost their connection to the music they produce.

"They have gotten far away from actually hanging out with the artists and really getting to know the music," Anthony said.

## Building a local scene

The Northwest, particularly Seattle, was the unlikely epicenter of the early '90s rock explosion that ended with the break-up of several leading bands and the shocking suicide of Nirvana frontman Kurt Cobain. As a result, Tucker said, artists in the Northwest are more cautious now when dealing with labels of any kind because of the concern of commercialization of their music.

"I think that people are still a little bit traumatized with everything that happened with grunge music," Tucker said. "I think that people really felt burned by the music industry and what it does to people — and the kind of attention that came and went without any kind of acknowledgment of the underground music scene."

Tucker said that she believes the music industry itself has spent too much time and money on creating one-hit-wonder bands.

"They would just sign all these bands, trying to get a hit out of them immediately, spending really exorbitant amounts of money on them," she said.

But it should be noted that the biggest difference between major and minor record labels is the major label's need to sell.

"An independent label can have a modest success and do incredibly well, where a major label needs to

have those sales," Goldberg said.

For example, he said, if the band Stereo Lab sells 50,000 copies of their release on indie label Drag City, then Drag City is set for the year.

"They're happy, and they've gotten a good result with it," he said. Goldberg said that major labels have enormous operating costs, including paying rent on buildings in music hubs such as New York or Los Angeles, and supporting large staffs.

"They have to sell," he said. "An independent label can be more discriminating and say, 'We think this band is really great — we don't know if they'll be huge — but we think that there will be enough of a market there that we will be able to make a profit from it, even if it's a modest profit, and we'll be happy with that.'"

Goldberg said that major labels often pressure their artists in order to boost sales.

"They are asked to make concessions, whether it's the way they look, the way their sound is, or what they'll do," he said, adding that independent labels are often free from such pressures.

Goldberg points to the New York City's band East River Pipe, who are on independent label Merge Records, as an example. East River Pipe's frontman F.M. Cornog doesn't like to play live shows, and Merge so far hasn't pressured him to do so.

"Of course, the record would sell a lot better if he did go out and tour, because there's a lot of press and retail potential that can generate from a tour," Goldberg said. "But Merge can respect that. I wonder if East River Pipe were ever on a major label, if he would be pressured into touring because there would be a lot more money behind them."

But Deb Bernadini counters that Warner Brothers doesn't pressure their artists to be anything but their creative selves. She points to Built to Spill as an example. The band went from independent label K Records to Warner Brothers in 1997, and frontman Doug Martsch has said that he doesn't find the experience unfavorable in the least. Bernadini said that most bands make the transition from a minor label to a major label very easily.

"Built to Spill has done it so well. Bands expect a lot of pressure," Bernadini said, adding that Warner Brothers believes that artists work best when they aren't being pressured by their label.

She also said that major labels like Warner have an undeserved negative reputation.

"Major labels absolutely have bad reputations," she said.

She added that people are often surprised to read about Martsch having a positive experience at a major label.

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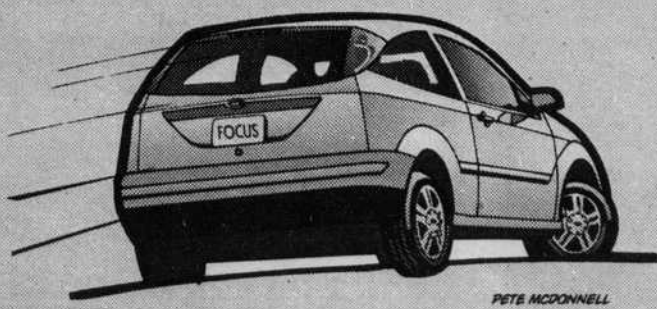
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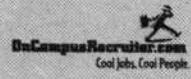
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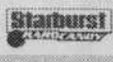

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