



Courtesy

K Records founder and musician Calvin Johnson will be appearing at the CoreStar Center located at 439 W. 2nd Ave. this Saturday.

Indie label owner takes to the road to promote album

Calvin Johnson founded K Records in the '80s to sign artists denied by big labels

By Ryan Nyburg
Senior Pulse Reporter

A stalwart of the independent music scene since the early 1980s, Calvin Johnson has done as much as anybody to show that a self-started independent record company can work.

Johnson — who founded K Records in Olympia, Wash. — promoted music often considered untouchable by larger record companies while at the same time paving new ground with his own band, Beat Happening.

Now on the road performing solo, Johnson talked to the Emerald about his music, running a record company and performing in front of an audience.

Emerald: How long have you been doing solo performances?

Calvin Johnson: About seven years now.

Emerald: Do you have a back up band?

Johnson: No, just me and a guitar.

Emerald: You founded K Records back in the 1980s. Is it still going strong?

Johnson: We're still plugging away. We're fortunate enough to be working with a number of very creative people who are busy performing, touring and making records. Mostly based in the Northwest, of course.

Emerald: Is it any more difficult to be an independent record company now than when you first started?

Johnson: It's never easy. You just keep going, getting the word out and letting people know what we're up to. We're just trying to share the music with as many people as might be interested. That's pretty much a full-

time job.

Emerald: So what do you think of the modern music industry and issues like downloading and music piracy? How does it affect how you do business?

Johnson: I don't really know. I haven't been paying attention. We've been so busy making music and getting it out there and playing shows that I don't really have time to keep up with all that.

Emerald: You've been an active songwriter for a number of years now. Do you find that your subject matter has changed over the years?

Johnson: Yes. I'll have quite a few newer songs at the show, including some from my solo album "What Was Me," and some older songs that have been recorded by bands I've been in. The new songs are songs that I made up in the last year or so.

Emerald: Do you find that people know you from bands like the Halo Benders or Beat Happening?

Johnson: Some people do, but those bands are not terribly well-known to begin with. There are plenty of people who are unfamiliar with what I do and hopefully they are pleasantly surprised.

Emerald: Are you touring with a band right now?

Johnson: No, I'm out here on my own.

Emerald: Where are you right now?

Johnson: I'm getting lunch at the local food co-op in Madison, Wis.

Emerald: Do you listen to a lot of modern music, or just stuff that comes through the record company?

Johnson: Well, I do hear a bit. I like the Black Lips. Weird War's new album is pretty great.

Emerald: Do you see a lot of independent labels still surviving?

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