



MODERN RADIO RECORD LABEL



BY RICH HORTON

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Questions answered By Tom Loftus, founder of Modern Radio Records

Why did you start the label?

I started Modern Radio Records in 1999 because I wanted to put out records by my friends who were in Killisnoe and the Misfires.

I knew a lot of other people who'd started record labels and I wanted to give it a try myself. I'd been attending and setting up shows for awhile and noticed there were a lot of local bands I liked, yet they didn't have records out or if they did, had a hard time with distribution. The main thing the label's about is the relationships I have with the people. I've gotten to work with and know many people over the years who've inspired and motivated me. I consider them family, rather than partners in a business transaction. I don't make music myself, but I really wanted to give something back, since music is such a major part of my life.

Who's on the Modern Radio Records roster?

The bands currently active are STNNG, Mirah, Will Whitmore, Paradise Island, FT (The Shadow Government), Sicbay, Deerhoof, The Vets, Cave Deaths, The Chambermaids, Malachi Constant, Tornavalanche, Tight Phantomz, Signal To Trust, The Plastic Constellations, Let's Be Active, Gene Defcon – and early on, we helped Motion City Soundtrack with a CDEP. We have upcoming releases by Styrofoam Duck and The Danforths.

Give us a brief history of the label.

The label has grown organically over the years. In our first year, the label released a handful of CDs by a series of local bands and everything started to develop in different ways. The out-of-town artists came from meeting people who I knew through friends, setting up shows or from catching their show here in town. For example, we ended up doing a 7" by Mirah after an exchange of e-mails starting with me writing a letter saying how much I really liked her first album. We had mutual acquaintances and later met at Ladyfest in 2000. The same thing happened with the Gene Defcon release. In 2005, my friend, Peter Mielech, started helping me with the label and is now a partner.

Do you have any label horror stories you'd like to share?

The major horror stories come from getting in the mindset it's only slightly more expensive to press 1,000 CDs, covers or vinyl records, instead of 500. We ended up with way too many copies of some records we released. It's an ongoing joke because we try to give away records by bands who've been defunct for quite some time. It's not that the records are bad, but when you have boxes upon boxes of records by inactive bands, you want to share them with people who might give them a listen, rather than stacking them on shelves. We've found it's often better to create enough to sell in the immediate future and it's been better for us to do smaller quantities, then we can put more care into the packaging and

some of our favorite records have really unique packaging. Distribution is always difficult and dealing with people on consignment is always a source of horror. When distributors fold or decide you aren't a priority, it's always a pain. It's happened here and there with Modern Radio, but we've been lucky for the most part.

How many demos do you get per month and what do you do with them?

We get between six and 12 physical demos a month, in addition to e-mails and messages regarding places to listen to music or see a band live. We try to listen to as many demos as we can. If it's good, we try to help the artist. If they aren't local, we try to help them get a show in town or if they are local, we try to check them out. We tend to pass on listening to things that show the person doesn't really have a clue what our label is about. We've released a variety of music and artists, but I can't imagine a day when we release a record by some Rusted Root/311/Sum 41 concoction. We haven't had a very good experience with demos. We'd personally rather work with people we know anyway; I couldn't imagine putting out a demo by someone we didn't know at all, I suppose we could, but in the seven years of running this label, it has yet to happen.

Tell us what you think of the Twin Cities music scene.

The local music community is incredibly diverse and vibrant. We could list a slew of local bands we'd want to see on any given night – it's almost overwhelming at this point. Funny thing is, most of the people going to shows these days are the same people making the music. Some people are concerned about the "industry" and where the music is headed, some would even warn musicians to be careful about putting anything out. But we're putting out more records this spring than we've put out in any given year – there's way too much good music being made right now. Maybe it's because there's a Republican in office, like the underground surge during the worst parts of the Reagan administration.

The "industry" doesn't really care about the Twin Cities, because we aren't seen as a tastemakers type market where bands that get big here, suddenly get big everywhere. When national attention does come to artists like Dillinger Four, Atmosphere, Hold Steady (via Lifter Puller), P.O.S and the Plastic Constellations, it's because they've paid their dues and worked their asses off for every ounce of recognition. Personally, I don't care, because we have tons of great stuff going on in the Twin Cities. Many would think without the national attention, that people here don't put much care into their music because it doesn't reap benefits financially. We like to surround ourselves with people who share a more balanced approach to music. It's a very blue collar, hard working music community where people go to work, practice and play socially because they love making music. We've found the people who are just in it to be famous or make money aren't really contributing creatively anyway.

We're really fortunate to have many good venues and record

stores. Most places would kill to have the great selection of new and used vinyl one can find in our local record stores; good record stores and music venues are the backbone of any vibrant music community. I am constantly told by touring bands how they really love playing in the Twin Cities because they're treated well by clubs. We're very fortunate and I think a lot of people won't realize how important these things are until they start disappearing.

What's next for Modern Radio Records?

We're doing a limited, screen-printed version of the new Dan-forths record on CD. In 2001, we released a 7" by Mirah (K records) and we are going to re-release this 7" with extra tracks on a CD this spring. We're doing the first full-length album by Styrofoam Duck, as well a bunch of other things up our sleeves for the rest of the year. One project that seems closest to happening is a Signal To Trust album, which I am incredibly eager for since they've recorded some amazing songs they've not released, but have performed live over the last few years.

Do you have any rants or raves you'd like to add?

Anyone who realistically thinks they can make a lot of money making music is going to have a rude awakening. Even if you do have a moderate amount of success and get great local gigs, the money will barely cover things like practice space rental. The same goes with labels, especially now when there's a generation of people who think first of downloading an album off the Internet versus going to a record store. We're fortunate to have a great music community in the Twin Cities – don't take it for granted and support your local independent venues and record stores.

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