

Chambana Record Label Round Table

by Jane Boxall

Champaign-Urbana boasts several independent record labels, including the well-established Parasol and Polyvinyl as well as the budding Innocent Words and student-run Green Street Records. Here, Jim Kelly of Parasol, Matt Lunsford of Polyvinyl and Troy Michael of Innocent Words discuss influences, iTunes and internet pirates.

How did your labels get started?

Kelly: Geoff Merritt started Parasol back in the late 1980s as a music collector's mail order shop. The Parasol label began the same way with lots of pop and vinyl. Mud Records was created to help document the burgeoning local scene of the early 1990s. It was Braid's *Age of Octeen* and three albums by Sarge that put Mud on the map, so to speak. In recent years we've released albums by Tractor Kings, Absinthe Blind, The Violents and Mad Science Fair.

Lunsford: Polyvinyl was started in 1996 by myself and Darcie Lunsford by accident, when our fanzine started to put out free records with the issues.

Michael: *Innocent Words Magazine* started in 2001 — I wanted to help bands I believed in around Champaign. Terminus Victor was the first to jump on board, and they are still with the label. I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the influence of Polyvinyl. Matt gave me the best advice that anyone has ever given me regarding music.

How has the music scene in C-U evolved over time?

Lunsford: I think the scene has really developed. It seems like there are many more venues now, but it's too bad that Green Street used to have three record stores in one block and now has none.

Michael: Yeah, in high school we would take weekend trips to Green Street and visit every

single music store. At one time I think there were five. Now there are zero.

Do you think that illegal downloading hurts stores and labels?

Lunsford: Illegal downloading helps people discover music more than it hurts sales.

Michael: I don't mind downloading as long as they pay for it. But for people to download an entire album for free is wrong and illegal.

Kelly: As much as the major labels whine and cry about it, indies will suffer right along with them.

Is the internet helpful to you?

Lunsford: The internet is amazing. We are able to get the word out about our records quickly and easily. We are selling more and more on iTunes. It's a breaking down of the traditional barriers and helps people find new artists.

Kelly: As an online mail order, the internet is crucial. As sales of CDs wane and we look toward engaging a generation of kids who have been born-and-bred downloaders, the digital realm is of utmost importance.

What's the most rewarding aspect of running a label?

Michael: Yesterday I got the new Cameran release, *A Caesarean*, from the FedEx guy. He brought up a cart of boxes full of CDs. There's no feeling like that. It's like Christmas.

Lunsford: The best thing is being a part of allowing artists to make the art that they want to make.

HUB

The UC-IMC: Central Illinois' Growing Indymedia Hub

In November of 2005, Illinois' twin cities welcomed the opening of the Urbana-Champaign Independent Media Center, housed within the Urbana Post Office at 202 South Broadway. The 5,000 square foot area on the first floor was converted into media production facilities, a performance space, library and more. Here, a U.S. government agency and working groups of the IMC coexist (the Post Office service remains). More accurately, the government is a tenant of the IMC and operates out of the remaining 25,000 square feet.

The IMC's origins are rooted in the idea of empowering the public through independent media and providing the tools to do so. Ever since the initial IMC was set up in Seattle to cover the 1999 World Trade Organization protests, the indymedia collective has been preaching its slogan — encouraging the public to "Become The Media" — and has flourished into a network of 150 affiliates throughout the world.

The facility is home to a network of autonomous media outlets and public programs including WRFU 104.5 FM, a community supported, low-power radio station; The Public i.; C-U's "Paper of the People"; and UC Books to Prisoners. It all makes for a refreshingly unique opportunity for the socially and politically conscious citizenry to institute change within their community and abroad. **HUB**

— Josh Kessler

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