

LABEL PROFILE

RED LETTER LIFE

Since bringing us modern emo trendsetters the Get Up Kids, Doghouse has harbored a regular rotation of big names (including the All-American Rejects and Say Anything) and continues to boast a roster of "it" bands (like Meg & Dia and Weatherbox). But what happens when little bands outgrow their little label? Boss Dirk Hemsath explains...

How'd it all start?

Back in 1987, I was playing in a band called Majority Of One, and I just wanted to put out our 7-inch so we could sell it at shows. I definitely never expected this to keep going. It wasn't until 1991, when we released Endpoint's *Catharsis* that we really turned into a "real" record label. Of those first few years, I just felt like I was doing as good a job as some of the labels my bands had been involved with, and I didn't particularly want to go get a regular job, so we stuck it out and here we are.

Doghouse has moved from Toledo, Ohio, to Los Angeles to New York City. Why all the bouncing around?

Actually, until our recent move to New York, I always had our main office here in Toledo. One obvious problem with [Toledo] is that it's not exactly a hotbed of passionate kids looking to come work for an independent record label, so for the last number of years I've always had a satellite office. The first satellite opened in Boston in 1998, and then the employees there decided among themselves to make the move to Los Angeles, which was fine with me since it's an important place to have a presence. The New York move made sense for me because I love the city and wanted to get a little closer to some of the other businesses, but it's also close to my home in Toledo.

Doghouse has had quite a bit of success lifting bands up to major labels. Is that intentional?

The All-American Rejects were the first band to really get pulled up so quickly like that and, in their case, it was very unexpected. We hadn't ever been at all involved with that world but decided together with the Rejects that it might be a good thing for them to take a shot at moving up. I do find a lot of bands now that look at their indie home as a bit of a stopgap before a major-label deal, which doesn't necessarily bother me. Though, I do think bands ought to be a bit more realistic about where they stand, initially. Today, we have a relationship with Warner Bros., which allows us to provide more resources for bands during their Doghouse career. But if a band thinks it's their time to move up to a major label, we'll work together to try and make something happen.

So the Rejects' move to DreamWorks was a mutual decision. How did that differ from the departure of the Get Up Kids?

Well, the Get Up Kids' situation was difficult because it was something I really didn't want to do. Vagrant had started to manage them, and the band felt they'd spent enough time with Doghouse, so we ended up doing a deal with Vagrant to put out their last record [*Something To Write Home About*] on the Doghouse contract. We had the opportunity to put out an EP of theirs in between, but the relationship got pretty strained for a while. Things have smoothed out over time, but I really see it all as a chain of events that was supposed to happen, because I remember Tyson [Ritter] from the Rejects confessing to me one day that he'd actually sent the band's demo to me after seeing our address printed on the back of the Get Up Kids' *Four Minute Mile*. I've got nothing but respect for the

THIS MONTH: DOGHOUSE RECORDS FOUNDER DIRK HEMSATH SAYS THERE'S NO CRYING IN EMO—WELL, IN THE BUSINESS OF EMO.

Get Up Kids' music, though. They're one of the few bands that spent several years known as one of the biggest things going on two different labels.

You also own and operate Lumberjack Distribution. How do you strike a balance between a label and a distro?

It's certainly not simple. Lumberjack isn't officially handled in the Doghouse office, though that's somewhat of a recent move. Back in 1997, Doghouse was a client of Lumberjack's, and the guys running the company didn't want to do it anymore, so I bought it. To be honest, Lumberjack really consumed most of my life for the next 10 years. It wasn't until about two years ago that I started trying to make a conscious effort to shift my attention back to the label. I've always had a label manager that can take on the day-to-day stuff, but I really wanted to get back and get my hands dirty with Doghouse again. *alt*



ESSENTIAL DOGHOUSE RELEASES

As chosen by Dirk Hemsath

1 CHAMBERLAIN/SPLIT LIP
Fate's Got A Driver

"This is one of the best records ever made, in my opinion."



2 THE GET UP KIDS
Four Minute Mile

"This album definitely gets me the most. 'Dude, that album changed my life' mail."



3 THE ALL-AMERICAN REJECTS

The All-American Rejects
 "I knew the minute I saw these guys play [for the first time] that they would be huge. This album went on to sell more than a million copies."



4 SAY ANYTHING
...Is A Real Boy

"The first time I heard Max [Bemis'] early demos I actually didn't like them at all, but a few days later, the songs started creeping back into my head with a vengeance."



5 JET LAG GEMINI
Fire The Cannons

"This is going to help define where Doghouse is going."



LOCATION: NEW YORK, NY
 ESTABLISHED: 1987
 EMPLOYEES: 8
 NUMBER OF RELEASES: 130