

I'll learn how to write). To celebrate th...

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The beautiful people

There is a power to looking different that those who never step out of their Patagonia will never fe...

PREVIOUS ISSUES
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have something to say about all of the issues that are interesting to indie bands, y'know? Everyone from our crew to promoters in different cities and bar owners - everyone's got two cents to throw into the pot."

Those penny thoughts add up to 234 pages of detailed - occasionally too detailed - notes, observations and advice on every conceivable step or obstacle in an independent band's path, from naming your band and choosing a practice space to stickering and posterizing through to marketing and promotion, royalties and publishing. It's a very impressive compendium of observations (contained in tasteful sidebars, not unlike Douglas Coupland's Generation X) by players in the industry and a point-by-point reconstruction of the necessary minutiae of band life. He didn't whip this thing off while waiting to sound check. Or maybe he did.

"It's amazing how the process of putting a book together isn't like putting an album together," Makoway laughs. "It was quite surprising to me just how slow it was, just how much more organized you have to be. Staying focussed for three years is something that's foreign to most musicians. It's hard to stay focussed for an afternoon.

"There are a lot of dead hours when you're on a tour bus.. Instead of watching the movie that you've seen five times, you can do something worthwhile with your time and try to stay sane by having something more to your life than just getting up, playing a show and going back to sleep.

"It's not dense, and I wasn't trying to make an encyclopedia. I just wanted to make a kind of guide that you could keep anywhere and just open it up to any page and get something out of it, y'know?"

Indeed, you're not going to pick up The Indie Band Bible for its prose - it's written in a very straightforward manner, simply, and with the subject matter at the reins. Given the broad nature of the constituency likely to take an interest in this kind of read, that was a wise move. This is not, however, Playing In Bands for Dummies. Makoway builds throughout the course of the book, steadily and forthrightly tackling successively more complex issues - grant applications, entertainment law, money management and the all-important "points" system, the percentages by which bands try and make money on album sales. It's a significant and often misunderstood area of music-making and selling: the points that even an established band makes on its recordings are extremely low (the next time you run into

Courtney Love, ask her about it and duck) and would discourage most bands intent on stardom from even starting. Makoway very wisely left this part for the end of the book.

"Well, the funny thing about bands is that you make money in ways that people don't expect. You don't make money from your record deal, per se - your record deal allows you to make albums, essentially."

Like a small business loan. "That sort of idea, except you don't have to pay it back if your album stiffs, fortunately, but it does permit you to do what you want to do. It's a big part of creating the buzz about a band, and their fame generally, so they can draw at shows and make money from playing and selling T-shirts. And also publishing - don't give away your publishing right away! - which is a big one where you'll make your money down the road."

It's this kind of knowledgeable, no-nonsense instruction that makes *The Indie Band Bible* an absolutely indispensable tool for starting and low-level bands. Makoway was careful to avoid using his own band as the model for success ("Bands take different routes to get to the same ultimate goal of being able to sell records and shows, and our way certainly isn't the way that everybody takes that journey, but we can certainly learn a lot from the mistakes that Moist has made"), and he writes with the understanding that not all bands want to be Moist. But he is unequivocal when he states that musicians of all stripes have to be more proactive.

"You're not going to get your music out there by sitting in your basement and thinking about it. You've got to go to shows and meet people and put the word out and get the ball rolling."

It's a timely publication in the post-Nirvana, post-major-label madness of the early '90s, when big companies were picking up indie bands by the bucket load hoping to make big profits on a largely unexploited "alternative" scene. Most of these bands turned hot potato after the buying market became saturated, and had to learn self-reliance, as did the next (and much more jaded) generation of "indie" bands intent on not repeating the mistakes of their forbears. To a certain extent, Makoway epitomizes this more recent notion of the musician as businessman.

"I remember sitting around long before we'd made any real industry contacts going, 'Man, how do you get into the music business?' You could call the president of the record label, that's not gonna work [laughs]. That never

works. It's hard to break into that music industry fortress, but there are a lot of really small things bands can do just in terms of micro-marketing themselves and getting their names out there that will make opening those doors a lot easier.

"Marketing a band, and I hate to say it, is like marketing anything." Indeed, this is the slowly woven thread that ultimately comprises the fabric of *The Indie Band Bible*. Writes Makoway, "By playing in a band you're selling your music and more than that, you're selling yourself: your ideas, your skills, your face, your name, your attitude. To use a word that all artists hate and all industry people seem to use, you're selling a product. In a weird way, you're the salesman and the merchandise, which can be a difficult thing to accept."

Makoway reiterates that over the phone from Toronto, where the band relocated from Montreal two years ago. "I'm not suggesting that any bands 'sell out,' that's not what we're talking about here. We're talking about being able to make a living with your band. When we got *Moist* going, we were very much an indie band; we were self-managed right up until the beginning of the *Creature* album."

Now *Moist*, as might well be imagined, has a little more room to manoeuvre, but that doesn't mean they still don't suffer the trials of your average indie outfit. They just recently lost original drummer Paul Wilcox, who left the band amicably to pursue other interests, and are just now in the beginning stages of writing a new album.

"At the moment we're just taking some time off. David [Usher] is really focussing on his album [Ed. In fact, at the time of this writing, I can hear him playing downstairs from the Hour office at MusiquePlus], so we're just taking a breather, which works out kind of nicely. So no, we haven't found a replacement for Paul yet. We'll be looking," he says, borrowing a suggestion from his book and bursting into laughter, "at many different candidates, and placing an ad in *Hour* and see what comes up."

The Indie Band Bible: The Ultimate Guide to Breaking a Band is in stores now, and Mark Makoway will be in Montreal as the guest celebrity judge at the CHOM L'Esprit 2001 finals at Club Soda, Aug 16. Speaking of which..

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Going into Turn 3, are Brighton, Droopy and Hush, and -Y-, in the third semi-final showcase of the CHOM

