

# cover story

FOR A MIDDLE OF THE MAP SCHEDULE, SEE PAGE 7



FROM THE ARTISTS

## L-A-B-E-L SPELLS F-A-M-I-L-Y

**Bands signed with the Record Machine feel the love. Nathan Reusch says the business is his baby.**

**O**n Saturday, Kansas City recording label the Record Machine will commemorate its eighth birthday.

But one of the founders of the label will tell you it's really celebrating the past three years, which have been its renaissance.

"We started in 2003, but for the first five years or so we went through lots of slow growing pains," said Nathan Reusch, who owns the label along with Mike Russo and Richard Robinett.

"We were putting out one, maybe two releases a year, learning on the fly. That was before the rise of digital-only releases. Once 2008 hit, things really took off."

TRM's roster now has 16 bands, including its two most-

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recent additions, Ad Astra Arkstra and Minden. On Friday and Saturday, 11 of those bands/acts will perform in Westport as part of Ink's Middle of the Map Fest. The four-venue festival features national touring acts and performers like Daniel Johnston, the Raveonettes, Cursive, and a host of local bands.

The festival has attracted some national attention. The

monster music website Pitchfork recently plugged the festival as noteworthy, along with three others scheduled for April.

The Record Machine was one of the chief organizers of the festival, hoping it will expose its bands and performers to more fans and also embellish the label's brand.

"We want to be a label like Sub Pop or Merge, where people think of a certain kind of music when they think of us," Reusch said.

Despite the many reasons not to pour money into something as speculative as recorded music, Reusch is committed to his label and its bands.

"It's a part of who I am," he said. "I'm single, I don't have a family. The label is my baby, my



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**ABOVE:** Some current Record Machine acts, clockwise from left: Saharan Gazelle Boy, Max Justus, Soft Reeds and Cowboy Indian Bear.

**LEFT:** Nathan Reusch, one of the owners of Record Machine, says he doesn't care how big his label gets, as long as it keeps helping musicians. "This is not a profitable venture," he says.

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## SCHEDULE

## friday night

**The Beaumont Club** (all ages)

7 p.m.: Paper Route  
8 p.m.: Work Drugs  
9 p.m.: Maps and Atlases  
10 p.m.: Two Door Cinema Club

**RecordBar** (18 and older)

7:30 p.m.: Continents  
8:30 p.m.: Deadringers  
9:30 p.m.: Roman Numerals  
10:30 p.m.: Dosh  
11:30 p.m.: El Ten Eleven

**The Riot Room** (21 and older)

7:45 p.m.: Spirit is the Spirit

8:45 p.m.: Minden  
9:45 p.m.: A Lull  
10:45 p.m.: The Casket Lottery  
11:45 p.m.: The Appleseed Cast  
Midnight (outside): DJ Stevie Cruz

**The Union** (21 and older)

10 p.m.: Believers  
10:45 p.m.: Max Justus  
11:15 p.m.: Motorboater:  
Midnight: Small Black  
Midnight (outside): Louder Than Bombs

saturday  
afternoon parties**The Riot Room** (21 and older)

2 p.m.: Bacon Shoe

3 p.m.: Reach  
4 p.m.: Vertigone and Trystyl  
5 p.m.: Les Izmoro  
**RecordBar** (all ages)  
2 p.m.: Ad Astra Arkestra  
3 p.m.: Lazy  
4 p.m.: Sam Billen  
5 p.m.: Saharan Gazelle Boy

## saturday night

**The Beaumont Club** (all ages)

7 p.m.: State Bird  
8 p.m.: Cowboy Indian Bear  
9 p.m.: Margot and the Nuclear So & So's  
10 p.m.: Daniel Johnston  
**RecordBar** (18 and older)  
9 p.m.: Reward Tree  
10 p.m.: Soft Reeds

11 p.m.: Tamaryn  
?Midnight: The Raveonettes  
**The Riot Room** (21 and older)  
6 p.m.: Noah's Ark Was a

## Space Ship

6:45 p.m.: Making Movies  
7:45 p.m.: Hospital Ships  
8:45 p.m.: Capybara  
9:45 p.m.: Candy Claws  
10:45 p.m.: The Life and

## Times

11:45 p.m.: Cursive  
Midnight (outside): DJ Sheppa of Nomathmatics/Botnet

**The Union** (21 and older)

10 p.m.: Scattered Trees  
11 p.m.: Little Brazil  
Midnight: Maps For Travelers

Midnight (outside): The Record Machine DJ's (Motorboater, Max Justus, Nartan, Pukage)

## 1 a.m.: Mansion

2 a.m.: Thee Water Moccasins

## tickets

Two-day tickets are \$25 and one-day tickets are \$20. They are available at middleofthemap-fest.com through 5 p.m. today for will-call pickup of wristbands at the Beaumont Club from 4 to 10 p.m. Friday and 2 to 8 p.m. Saturday. After online sales end, any remaining wristbands will be sold at the Beaumont Club and the RecordBar.

## LABEL

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family.”

A lot of its bands feel the same way.

## III

The baby took its first steps in 2003. The first group TRM signed was a five-piece band called the James Dean Trio.

“They were a metal/hard-core/fusion-jazz act,” Reusch said. “All local guys.”

One of his other early bands became one of his favorites, the ambient/bedroom pop band and now-defunct Winston Jazz Routine, which released the first of its three recordings in January 2005.

“They were phenomenal,” Reusch said. But they didn't last.

“Back then, every time we released an album, it was like starting over,” Reusch said. “But with every release we learned something new: This works, this doesn't work. We kept changing and redefining what we do.”

Things took a pivotal turn when the label signed Max Justus.

“We'd had nothing like that on the label,” Reusch said. “It was all really new to me. I'd never really explored electronic music and Max Justus showed me it had a lot more depth than I'd given it credit for.”

That was also the time when the label decided it would refocus.

“That was when we shifted our attention from regional back to Kansas City and local bands,” Reusch said.

By 2008, TRM had expanded from two to three to seven bands. Three years later, that number has more than doubled.

record machine  
bands

For bios and a list of recordings and links to Bandcamp and iTunes, visit [www.therecordmachine.net](http://www.therecordmachine.net).

\*Ad Astra Arkestra  
The Billen Brothers  
\*Capybara  
\*Continents  
\*Cowboy Indian Bear  
\*Lazy  
\*Max Justus  
\*Minden  
\*Motorboater  
The Parade Schedule  
Perhapsy  
\*Saharan Gazelle Boy  
\*Sam Billen  
\*Soft Reeds  
\*State Bird  
Caleb Winn

\*Performing at the Middle of the Map Fest

Growth has required more attention, more work. Success has generated more business.

“We've always taken it seriously,” Reusch said. “But we've had to make sacrifices because we all have full-time jobs.”

But as other bands witnessed the label's growth and recognized its “brand,” it became easier to increase the size of its fold. Bands/acts that join the label get a variety of support and services, depending on what each wants and expects. Foremost, they get a sense of collegial community.

“I think the strongest attribute of the label is the family that

comes with it,” said Ben Grimes, founder of Soft Reeds. “We all know and enjoy one another, both personally and professionally, and have found lots of inspiration in that. We all encourage and push one another to do better, go further, etc. If one of our bands blows up (is successful), it can only be good for the rest of us, so I think we all feel an investment in the projects at the label.”

Grimes came to TRM despite a rocky big-label history. His former band the Golden Republic signed to EMI/Astralwerks, which released the full-length “Golden Republic” in 2005. Like so many big-label deals, this one did not end well.

“After the whole experience of being on EMI with the Golden Republic, I completely swore off record labels,” he said. “My thinking was that I'd go it alone in a very DIY, punk-rock sort of way, but I rather quickly found myself feeling discouraged by what was really available to me in the world of online self-promotion.”

After some gentle prodding from Reusch, Grimes reconsidered. A few days later, a handshake agreement was reached.

“I've been friends with Nathan for more than 10 years,” Grimes said. “He has always seen and understood where I come from, and our history, and the trust we have in one another was foundational to our decision to be a part of each other's vision. I went into our deal knowing exactly what I wanted from a record label, and it was pretty much in line with Nathan's vision for his company. It really was an organic fit.”

Likewise Dan Eaton, the artist behind the digital-pop act Mo-

torboater, said he joined the label for similar reasons: trust, friendship, shared visions.

“My agreement with TRM is, more or less, unspoken,” Eaton said. “I love what they are doing as curators; I love them as my friends. In this day and age, it's more important to have a family of people who support your art than it is to just have a huge budget to toy with. Money doesn't make music good.”

## III

That support comes in many ways beyond money: publicity, booking shows, getting bands opening slots for national tours, organizing label showcases, honing and refining all things Web- and social-media related or just dispensing advice.

“The label has helped us fund the pressing of our vinyl,” said Martinez Hilliard of Cowboy Indian Bear. “Nathan has worked tirelessly to get us on the radar in the blog culture. It's really nice to have an extra set of hands to help us out with practical things and to sit down and talk with us about certain strategies.”

Because different bands have different goals and game plans, strategies are different. And Reusch and label are adaptable to them all, said Mark Harrison of the band Capybara.

“Like Soft Reeds: Their frontman (Grimes) was in a national touring band,” Harrison said. “He has a mature, level-headed approach about this. He's not looking for a rock-star opportunity.”

“Then there's Cowboy Indian Bear. They want to capitalize on this incredible batch of music. They're looking for bigger opportunities. They both have their priorities set.

“And Nathan is there to help. But he's not going to force ideas down anyone's throat. He's there for advice and guidance and support, not to steer anyone into a different place.”

That practical advice comes in many forms, such as how to release new music.

“For a new band, it's probably not a good idea to release a full-length album out of the gate, which is often the focus” he said. “Most new bands aren't ready for it. They have five or six good songs, the rest is filler they won't be playing live in a year or two.”

So for one of his newest bands, Minden, he proposed an introductory 7-inch debut release.

“I knew before I heard a note of music I'd want to sign them,” Reusch said. “It's Casey Burge's band. He was in Kelpie, one of my favorite Lawrence bands. Ryan Johnson is in it, too — a great drummer.”

Minden is among the latest family members, but it likely won't be the last. Reusch said he has no limit for the size of his label, as long as it can give all bands the help they need. And as long as resources last.

“This is not a profitable venture,” he said. “That's not why we do it. I'll keep doing it until I break, physically or financially. But it would take a disaster to get to that point.”

“I do it because I love what it represents: this community of musicians who represent a Kansas City brand. It's so much about personalities and relationships, not just between us and the bands, but between the bands, too.

“It really has become a family.”

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