## Labelled

Rising from 'a logo and a P.O. box' to one of the biggest independent punk/ rock labels in the world, Brett Gurewitz's record label EPITAPH has been pushing back boundaries for twenty five years. Here's how...





BACK IN '82, a twenty year old guy called Brett probably would have laughed until it hurt if you told him that his new label Epitaph, used to put out his band Bad Religion's self-titled EP and debut album 'How Could Hell Be Any Worse?' and named after a King Crimson song, would hit it big in '94 with an album by The Offspring that would sell eleven million copies worldwide. However, that's exactly what happened...

"I originally started the label to make a 7-inch record for my band," explains Mr. Brett: "Back in 1980, you could make a 7-inch if you could scrounge together a few hundred bucks, you know? And then, if you put five songs on that 7-inch, you've got an EP. We were a garage band, and we wanted to make an EP, so we did it and that was the whole purpose of the label at that time. One thing led to another, and what started out as a hobby, turned into a whole career – and I consider myself very fortunate in that respect!"

As Bad Religion became more popular through the '80s with their adrenaline-charged punk, Gurewitz's label also grew and in '87 he moved Epitaph to his new recording studio and released L7's self-titled debut album. Bad Religion's classic album 'Suffer', released in '88, was a first for Epitaph too because it was the first album that was released and distributed through the label. Things were building gradually with bands such as NOFX, No Use For A Name and Down By Law on their roster in the early '90s, but the punk explosion of the mid '90s would change everything.

In 1994 The Offspring's third album 'Smash' lived up to its name and, alongside Green Day's 'Dookie', saw punk again erupt into the mainstream. Despite a weakening business relationship which would end bitterly between The Offspring and Epitaph, it would make Epitaph the biggest independent punk label on the planet. The hit single 'Come Out And Play' was all over the radio and MTV and 'Smash' became the biggest selling independent label album of all time.

"That record (and thank you very much, Offspring) put us on the map," Mr. Brett admitted to the Washington Post this year: "It opened doors. I could get a meeting with whoever. Up until that time, we had to scratch and claw



our way into whatever nooks and crannies we could. It wasn't easy for an indie to get a record into a chain store. Indies were second-class citizens back then, but from that day forward we could sell any of our titles in any chain in the country. Everything changed.

'94 was also the year that albums from NOFX ('Punk In Drublic') and Rancid ('Let's Go'), both of which went gold in the US on Epitaph and '95 saw Rancid's '... And Out Come The Wolves' go plat-

Through the early '90s, Rancid's Tim Armstrong and Mr. Brett had become close friends and the label's recent success allowed for expansion in the form of sister labels. Armstrong has said that "Epitaph is our home" and in '96 he entered into a partnership with Epitaph to start the sister label Hellcat, to push street punk and ska and launch bands such as the Dropkick Murphys, The Distillers and Tiger Army. ANTI- was another offshoot of Epitaph that allowed Mr. Brett to expand outside of punk and sign soul, blues, hip hop and country acts, as well as legendary artists such as Tom Waits and Nick Cave. Epitaph itself would start to sign more diverse bands in recent years.

With emo and pop punk bands such as Motion City Soundtrack, I Am Ghost and Matchbook Romance, as well as alt. rap acts such as Sage Francis and Atmosphere, Mr. Brett ignored criticism from punk bands on his label to continuing driving Epitaph forward. But that doesn't mean he's abandoned punk by any means, having recently put out The Draft's







debut album and another Bouncing Souls record, as well as distributing Watford's own punk hellraisers Gallows in the US.

Now with headquarters in Hollywood and offices in Amsterdam and Toronto, Epitaph shows what a punk DIY attitude and one hell of a lot of determination can achieve. Epitaph and Mr. Brett will continue to go against the grain for some time yet. Thank fuck for that.

Ian Chaddock























## FUCK ARMAGEDDON... THIS IS SWELL!

Ten Epitaph albums that are punk rock classics...

BAD RELIGION 'Suffer' (1988) THE OFFSPRING 'Smash' (1994)

NOFX 'Punk In Drublic' (1994)

RANCID '... And Out Come The Wolves' (1995) THE DESCENDENTS 'Everything Sucks' (1996)

H20 'F.T.T.W.' (1999)

HOT WATER MUSIC 'A Flight And A Crash' (2001)

MOTION CITY SOUNDTRACK 'Commit This To Memory' (2005)

THE BOUNCING SOULS 'The Gold Record' (2006)

THE DRAFT 'In A Million Pieces' (2006)