



Our Noise: The Story of Merge Records, the Indie Label That Got Big and Stayed Small

By John Cook, Mac McCaughan, Laura Ballance

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For twenty years, Merge Records has remained true to their belief that you can sign bands because you love their music and respect what they're trying to do. As giant corporate labels struggle for survival, Merge has, in the unlikeliest of times, garnered a loyal group of artists and a secure and growing fan base and, most important, has brought us some of the best music of our time. Merge Records defies everything you've heard about the music business and the fact that the company is prospering in a failing industry is something of a miracle.

In celebration of their twentieth anniversary, *Our Noise* tells the story of how Merge did it and continues to do it, through the eyes of cofounders Mac McCaughan and Laura Ballance, their fellow band members, friends, and the bands who signed on with them. It includes interviews with and profiles of Superchunk, Butterglory, Neutral Milk Hotel, Lambchop, Spoon, the Magnetic Fields, and the Arcade Fire.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Freelance reporter Cook and Merge cofounders McCaughan and Ballance trace the history of the North Carolina-based record label that started in a bedroom and now releases some of indie rock's biggest names. The story is composed as a book-long conversation between McCaughan and Ballance (also founding members of Superchunk, hailed as the next Nirvana in the 1990s and one of Merge's first major hits) and myriad other voices from the music industry. Started in 1989 in Chapel Hill, Merge always put music and musicians first, with McCaughan and Ballance hand-stuffing the label's first seven-inch releases and eschewing contracts in an effort to keep things friendly. In a prime example of its dedication to artistic vision over pure profit, Merge took a gamble on Stephin Merritt and Magnetic Fields's ambitious three-disc opus, *69 Love Songs*, when any major label would have balked. That record made numerous top 10 lists in 1999 and has sold more than 150,000 copies. While some of the label's artists may be beyond the scope of the casual music fan, bands like Magnetic Fields, Spoon and Arcade Fire demonstrate how vital Merge is to the indie rock landscape. (Sept. 15)

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Review

Merge always put music and musicians first. . . . [B]ands like Magnetic Fields, Spoon, and Arcade Fire demonstrate how vital Merge is to the indie-rock landscape.--*Publishers Weekly*

From small beginnings, twenty years later, Merge has become one of the top independent labels in the world. --NPR's *Sound Opinions*

One of the most respected imprints in an often disreputable industry, Merge has defied the odds by releasing some of the finest rock and pop music of the last 15 years. --*Chicago Tribune*

The fact that they exist and that they've survived is really kind of amazing these days. It's really difficult and they've done really well. --David Byrne

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