

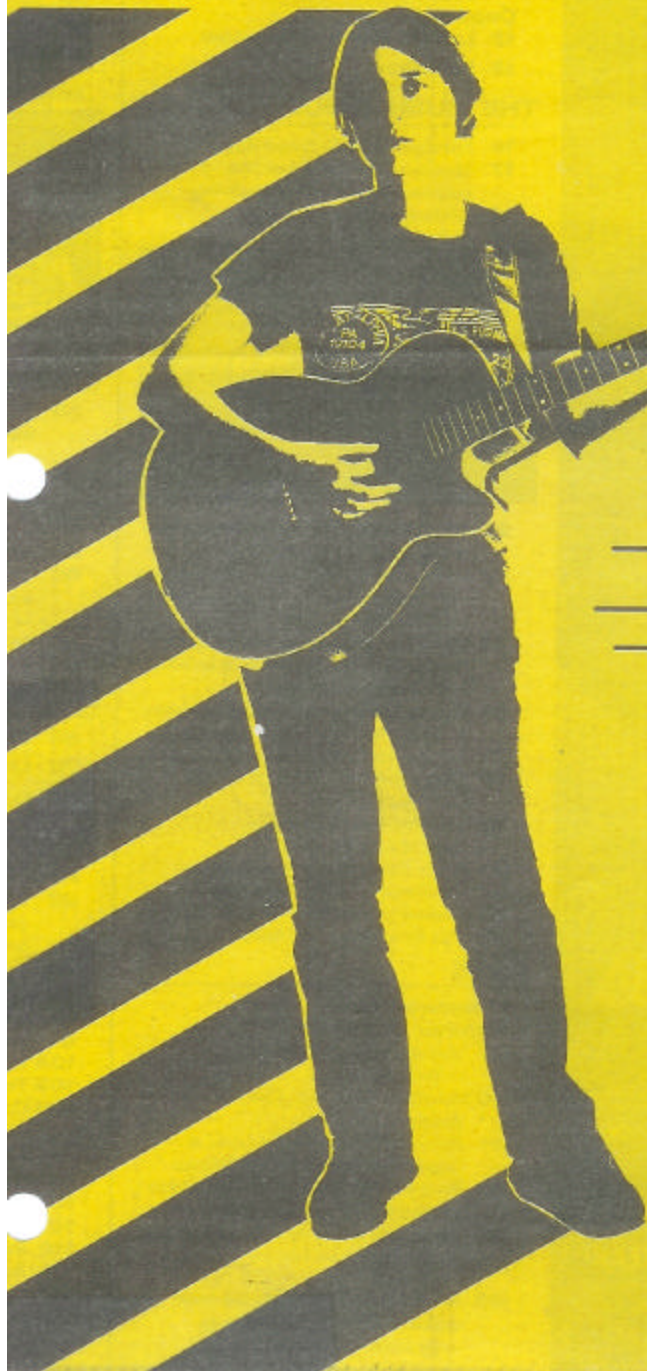
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THE MUSIC ISSUE

A hands-on, how-to, do-it-yourself guide
to making it in the Philadelphia
music scene.

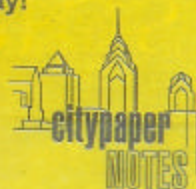


INCLUDES TIPS ON:

Getting mastered! Naming your band!
Making stylish fliers! Commanding a stage!

PLUS:

Instrument makers!
Musicians who teach!
Indie poster designers!
Cynthia G. Mason on self-releasing!
Tommy Conwell on getting radio play!
Adam "Atom" Goren on touring!
Shelley Spector on album art!
Want-ad fables!
Practice space horror stories!
That's a lot! And it's all local!



Meet Your Maker

Inside Disc Makers, the area company that makes music something to be held.

By Helen I-lin Hwang

OK, you've got your digital-mixed master ready to go after that grueling day/week/month you spent in the recording studio. Eight-track, 16-track, nth-factor-of-eight-track, you've got it all. Now, what do you do with your masterpiece album? There are only so many CDs you can burn with your home computer. And you know what? The fans want something nicer. Since Sony Music hasn't picked you up and taken care of the business of creating physical CDs for you, it's time to be resourceful.

Just over the Ben Franklin Bridge in Pennsauken is Disc Makers, one of the leading independent CD manufacturers in the country. (They quit making vinyl only last year because the market demand couldn't sustain the production line.) The Ballen family, which started the company in 1946, has seen the fluctuating trends of the music industry for more than a half-century.

Still, the company's focus has always been about the "working bands, the

ones that still have day jobs and are pursuing their music for the love for it," says Anne Ballen-Ladenson, 38, executive vice president and granddaughter of founder Ivin Ballen. An avid music fan, she has gone to see many of the bands Disc Makers has worked with. She and her playwright husband, Michael Ladenson, lived in Center City up until last year, when they opted for the Jersey suburbs for the sake of their toddler daughter.

Always on the lookout for the little guy, Disc Makers' most popular package is 1,000 CDs in full-color jackets for \$990. The price also includes a UPC bar code, which can otherwise cost \$750 and cause big headaches with the paperwork. In addition, Disc Makers arranges

a distribution deal with CD Baby, which helps ensure that online music sales of your album on iTunes Music Store or AOL's MusicNet go into your bank account instead of some media magnate's. Proofs of the artwork are sent for your approval before the jackets get printed. And if you like, you can

have a song reviewed by the TAXI A&R agency.

Disc Makers also sells jewel boxes, 16 cents each, in 200-count cartons.

The price drops to 12 cents each when you order in quantities over 5,000. In some circles, digipak — a distinctive environmentally friendly package design that uses 65 percent less plastic than a jewel box — is preferable, since they're harder to bootleg, "a big problem with Latin, Caribbean and Asian music," according to Ballen-Ladenson. Disc Makers also manufactures knockout boxes, die-cut jackets and paper sleeves. Each year, they produce 25 million CDs (which

is what the major-label plants manufacture in one month) for 10,000 different albums. They also have an on-site printing press.

Besides manufacturing, Disc Makers can take care of copyrighting, postproduction and art design. There are limits to their services, though; the company doesn't provide a recording studio, or actually distribute. That isn't a problem these days though, says Ballen-Ladenson: "The Internet is an awesome leveling device for independents. You can put stuff

on CD Baby and Amazon.com. You put stuff [up] for sale. People can find you and buy it."

With all these services, Disc Makers has appealed to just about everyone, from local indie bands to Live, from Roy Rogers to Wu Tang Clan. Not so surprisingly, they've got a nice niche with polka Grammy nominees and others who don't interest mainstream labels. One of their clients, Thomas Dolby, a big name in the '80s no longer signed to a record label, has done a couple of releases with Disc Makers that will be sold through CD Baby.

For Ballen-Ladenson, the company is her baby.

"I love this business. It's a family business. ... I like to think Disc Makers is making a difference in people's careers." Her enthusiasm for the music business is shared among company employees, some of whom are also musicians. A recent internal e-mail reads, "Does anyone have a guitar today? There's a monster player coming in and I really want to jam."

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Find more information at www.discmakers.com.

