

UD student owns, manages record label from his room

By MICHELE MARLEY
Special to The News Journal

BRANDYWINE HUNDRED — University of Delaware student Darren Walters has already gotten a taste of the real world.

At 22, Walters manages his own record label from his home in Wynnwood in Brandywine Hundred. The Concord High School graduate is co-owner and label manager for Jade Tree, an independent label that has produced records for eight bands across the country.

"My main function is that I take care of radio and magazine promotion," says Walters. "I take care of the bookkeeping and accounting. I used to take care of distribution until Mordam [a record distribution company] picked us up. I also do general public relations and shipping and receiving."

As if that is not enough, Walters is a full-time student as an English major with a history minor. He works part time to support himself and plays in a local band, Railhed.

Walters' office is in his bedroom and consists of a file cabinet and computer.

"It can be a hassle and you wonder, well, we've got our debts and we've got our deadlines. But then again, what keeps me going is that I don't think I could work for anyone else," he said.

In two years, Walters and his partner, Tim Owen of Washington, D.C., have managed to launch the Jade Tree label internationally. They work with San Francisco-based Mordam to release records in stores and collect timely payment for sales.

According to Walters, the international market is wide open for independent labels.

"It's just a network. You've just got to get into it. It's not even that hard. The people in Europe are fanatical for American independent music. Germany is such an intense market right now. It's a gigantic market of people who have money and they want to spend it," he said.

Jade Tree Records are on sale in local music stores, including Rainbow Records, Sam Goody and Bert's. They are circulated nationwide and have recently hit markets in Japan, Hungary, Great Britain and Spain.



Special to The News Journal/
ROBERT CRAIG

Darren Walters in his office/bedroom.

Dressed in ordinary, casual clothes with short, sandy blond hair, Walters looks like any other college student. He says he does not live the typical rock 'n' roll lifestyle and does not do anything associated with that. What he does is follow music with a passion. Walters describes himself as a longtime music fan and is still coming to terms with his success. "As a fan, it's hard to believe that I am putting out or making music that others like," he says.

Most of the bands that Jade Tree has produced records for are from out of state. Pitchblende (Virginia), Eidolon (Boston) and 4 Walls Falling (Virginia) are just a few who have released tapes, records and CDs under the Jade Tree label. Walters describes the music as alternative or experimental but says Jade Tree will consider almost anything. "People send us stuff, but our main criteria is that Tim and I have to like it. And that's hard with anything because even if one of us doesn't like it, then it doesn't get put out."

Walter's band, Railhed, has just produced its first record under Jade Tree. He says Jade Tree has not produced any records for bands in Delaware yet because

they do not want to be limited to the state. At the same time, he hopes that his release will bring added recognition to the label at home. "Hopefully, with the release of my band's record on Jade Tree, since it seems that my band is getting a little more popular in this area, people will say 'Oh, it's on Jade Tree' and 'Oh, Jade Tree is here.' And I'm not even sure that people know that Jade Tree is here."

When asked about the support he receives from the university and the local music scene, Walters' enthusiasm drops a bit. He says his records are played nationwide on independent radio stations, but he would like to see more support from WVUD-FM, the University of Delaware radio station.

Walters says the university has overlooked the potential of local musicians in favor of major label groups who attract more attention. "Along the same lines, the University of Delaware has bigger bands like Chicago playing here and while that is not bad, there doesn't seem to be any motivation to get [local bands] to play on campus," says Walters. "There is not a whole lot of support that way."

After graduation, Walters plans to pursue his business full time and continue to play in his band. He says he feels more strongly about the label than about anything he has learned in school.

