

## BURGER RECORDS

*Collectors Weekly* called Burger Records "one of the fastest growing independent music labels in the world." *GQ* said they're "America's best underground record label." Poised somewhere between iconoclasm and half-serious homage, Burger is the record label of tomorrow — the neon-green portal connecting rock 'n' roll history with today's teenage consciousness. Founded in 2007 during the financial crisis, Burger is the band that became a brand. Thee Makeout Party!, the first Burger band, included the label's two scruffy captains of industry, Sean Bohrman and Lee Rickard, who run Burger with the blind optimism of a Disney Imagineer and the fearlessness of a teenager skateboarder.

"We put it on the line every single day," says Bohrman, 33, who left his corporate gig and cashed-out his 401(k) to start Burger. "This is my life. I gave up everything for rock 'n' roll."

**Why name a record label after a sandwich?** "It's Americana," says Rickard. "We're paying homage to our favorite bands that had their own labels, like The Beach Boys and The Turtles." Rickard, 32, grew up on a horse stable in Anaheim, and always wanted to run his own burger joint. He's also the label's madcap visionary — just crazy enough to make you believe Burger can change the world.

In just eight years, Burger has created a giant dent in the music industry. The Fullerton-based label has helped develop 750 bands, release 100 LPs, and expand globally with a pop-up shops appearing everywhere from SXSW to Tokyo's Shibuya district. They've acted as the gateway-drug that helped popularize Burger alums like King Tuff, Thee Oh Sees, and Ty Segall. From Orange County to Madrid, consumers have slurped-up Burger's secret sauce to the tune of 350,000 cassette releases, each stamped with the bubbly Burger logo. With a Monkees-esque devotion to merchandising, Burger has saturated the market with cassettes by everyone from homegrown bands like Cherry Glazerr, to mainstream acts like Weezer and Dave Grohl. Their prolific output has infiltrated every nook and cranny of teenage America. In that sense, Burger is an entrepreneurial marvel of the modern age. Swimming against the tide in 2007 by embracing "cassette culture," Burger now leads a worldwide movement that consists of a quasi-religious devotion to cheeky merchandise, DIY culture, and rainbow-colored cassettes.

**Why cassettes?** Almost anyone can afford one," says Bohrman, whose interpersonal mellowness contrasts Rickard's engaging intensity. An obsessive researcher and

Trekkie, Bohrman runs Burger as if he's commanding a starship. Cassettes are his rocket fuel. "They're durable and give consumers a piece of their favorite band." Bohrman's first cassette was Van Halen's *5150*. Burger now has a cassette vending machine at an Urban Outfitters in Omaha. Thee Makeout Party!, Audacity, Devon Williams, The Go, and Nobunny were the first Burger cassettes. The label is also the North American organizer of Cassette Store Day.

**But they're not just a cassette label.** Burger is a global brand propagated through an MTV-style online show called BRGRTV, produced by Burgermaniacs Jack Sample and Steele O'Neal; a rock 'n' roll radio show that unearths everything from forgotten doo-wop to '60s garage rock, and like a mini-WWE, Burger is constantly promoting their stars on the road. Simultaneously, Burger shows have taken place in Milan, Melbourne, Paris, Stockholm, and Tel Aviv. In the U.S., Burger's dizzying list of mini-festivals include the Burger Boogaloo, Burgermania, Burger Oasis, Burger a-Go-Go (their "punk rock Lilith Fair"), and their main attraction, Burgerama. Four years later, Burgerama seemingly triples in attendance each time – from 1,000 attendees in 2012 to 9,000 in 2015 – drawing praise from festival-hating rock stars and crazed teenagers from around the world. Burger-branded events (including Burgerama) pay homage to their heroes, like The Mummies and Ronnie Spector, but also help introduce local acts like together PANGEA. "We believe in our stars!" says Rickard.

Located in a strip-mall near Disneyland, Burger's physical store (which opened in 2009) is their DIY dream factory: a quasi-skate shop meets record surplus that nurture Burger's stable of artists. From their headquarters, Bohrman and Rickard have shown an uncanny knack for spotting talent. Their relentless cross-marketing has helped develop unrefined acts into full-blown stars. Everyone from Volcom, Vans, Sub Pop, and fashion moguls at Yves Saint Laurent has joined forces with Burger and its caravan of stars, which includes popular neo-punk band The Garden. Psych-pop artist Gap Dream actually lives at the Burger store.

In 2011, Burger launched its first subsidiary, Wiener Records, which functions as their low-key revolution to discover unsigned talent and release anything, literally, *anything* with sound. "Everyone's a Wiener!" says Rickard. "It's all inclusive. We just ask for a small fee, and then we design, distribute, and sell their work behind the Burger name." Managed by Burgermaniac Danny Gonzalez, Wiener is Burger's million-dollar idea to democratize music, with a smile. "You could already be Wiener!" They've also inked a distribution deal with Redeye, which represents America's top independent labels. In 2014, Burger Music Publishing was launched in partnership with Mothership Music. And like any burgeoning empire, Burger is giving back to the community. They've launched dog and kitty benefit releases, donated to ASPCA, sponsored a child through Children International, and turned cassette sales into donations for Action Against Hunger.

**What type of music does Burger release?** Not just sleazy punk and bubblegum music. Burger acts as both musical archivist and artist development studio. They've

helped reintroduce acts like Dwight Twilley, Redd Kross, The Muffs, and The Go to millennial music fans (they even have their own "Burger Archival Project"), while at the same time, releasing everything from Tel Aviv shoegaze, old-school hip hop groups like The Pharcyde, Appalachian country, and by the end of the year...Green Day.

As a result of positive thinking attributed to *The Secret*, Burger's sunny rock 'n' roll agenda is spreading like Beatlemania. Earlier this year, Burger officially expanded into L.A. with their boutique GnarBurger shop. Burger is also working on a top-secret project to bring the cassette player onto the digital age. It's called *Burger Buddy 1*; their mash-up of the iPod meets Walkman. They also have plans for a futuristic compound to house their ever-expanding empire. "We'll go anywhere," says Rickard. "Burger Records in space? Heck, yeah!" In other words, Burger is going galactic!