

SINKHOLE

I (Frank FOE) conducted this interview via the internet with Jon Clark, mastermind behind Ringing Ear Records and the guitarist/vocalist for Sinkhole...

FOE Your first cd, "Groping For Trout" was released on your own label (Ringing Ear)... your second "Space Freak" was released on Dr. Strange.. why was this, and how many of each disc have you sold?

Well, we went into the recording of "Space Freak" with the intention of putting it out on Ringing Ear, but when we finished, the label was really broke (we had just released the Bender CD, plus we had flown an engineer out from San Diego to do the recording) and it looked like it would take a while for us to get back the money to put a new Sinkhole album out. So I sent a cassette of the new stuff to Dr. Strange, since he had always liked the band and had sold a bunch of our records through his catalog, and he called back and said that he wanted to put it out. We talked about it and decided that he was a good guy and that we could trust him to do a good job with it. Plus, his label has a pretty strong following already, and he's got Mordam distribution, the best distribution in the world, so we figured that a one-off release with Dr. Strange would help to get the band some good distribution and recognition which would help future Sinkhole records on Ringing Ear sell better.

As far as sales go, "Groping For Trout" has sold about 3,000 so far, "Space Freak" I think is around 6-7,000.

FOE When will your next disc be released and who will be releasing it and why did you decide which label?

We'll be recording our next full-length the first week of February, so depending on how fast the artwork and layout gets done, it should be out sometime in April or June. It's going to be on Ringing Ear, because the main reason we started the label in the first place was so we could release our own stuff. It's just a lot of fun to be fully responsible for the promotion and distribution of your own record. Plus, I really want Ringing Ear to grow as a label, and getting a new Sinkhole album out will help to raise both awareness in the label and money for the release of records by other bands we like.

FOE "Tumble Mat" is one of the best songs I've ever heard in my entire life (Sinkhole has tons of great songs mind you)... what inspired the lyrics and the reference to a tumble mat?

I hate to disappoint you, but the lyrics to that song are pretty meaningless. We had the music to the song written and a vocal melody to go with it, and then just filled in the blanks with a bunch of words that rhymed. I'm not exactly sure where the tumble mat part came from. I think it was just something that rhymed and had the right number of syllables.

FOE How does it feel to have one of the Top Ten 7's of the year, two years in a row in FOE's year end Tops Lists (1994 for "Donkey", 1995 for "Tumble Mat")?

It's an unbelievable honor, something we'll all be able to tell our grandchildren about.

FOE When you write and record a song, don't you wish you could make everyone listen to it... I guess what I am asking also relates to... with all of the pop/punk/melody/speed bands out there, how do you make yourself stand out amongst all of the others? Do you find it frustrating trying to get the word out on your band or are you happy with your current level of success?

You know, there's such a huge audience out there now for punk music that it would be really stupid for a band or label at our level to be satisfied with their current level of success. Plus, it seems like once you get satisfied, the motivation to improve is diminished and you're probably going to get lazy and start sucking. So you've always got to be thinking about how to get more people to hear your band and buy your records, especially if you're involved on the record label end of things, because really, that's what your job is. But the matter of how to get a good buzz going around a band is something that I think about a lot and is something that really baffles me sometimes, and yes, it can get very frustrating.

Take the New Sweet Breath album we just put out on Ringing Ear, for example. In my mind, it's one of the best and most interesting albums to come out in the last 3-4 years. But they're not from a particularly hot punk scene, they don't feature any well-known ex-members, they're playing a style of music that doesn't easily fit into currently popular trends, they're not on a buzz label like Fat, Revelation, Lookout, etc., and so the album goes relatively unnoticed. And then I hear about some band that's not even worthy of changing New Sweet Breath's guitar strings but they've got that buzz and so they're selling over ten thousand copies of a record and it makes me really mad and frustrated. See, you can take out ad after ad and send hundreds of promo copies to zines,



radio, stores, or whoever, and the record still won't do shit unless you can get the people who actually buy records to start talking about it. Word of mouth is still the best way to sell records. Look at the first Drive Like Jehu album. Cargo didn't do shit to promote that album - I can't remember seeing a single ad for that record - yet everybody was talking about it and so it sold a lot of copies. That's what it takes. So it's a big challenge for me to figure out how to get a buzz going around both my band and bands on my label like New Sweet Breath. But I do really feel like I've got some good stuff here and pretty soon the kids will find out about it and start spreading the word. It's just frustrating waiting for that to happen and trying to figure out what I need to be doing to make sure that it starts to happen.



Chris Pierce—Drums, Vocals

Jon Clark—Guitar, Vocals

F&E Why did Doc Hopper (who are on Ringing Ear) win the Boston Rock and Roll Rumble in 1995 and not Sinkhole? What is the relationship between Doc Hopper and Sinkhole, don't you share a member or something like that?

Because a certain bass-playing member of Sinkhole was prancing around England with his girlfriend at the time the Rumble took place so Sinkhole couldn't participate. But the Rumble's a pretty cheesy event so we weren't brokenhearted to have missed it. The band member we share with Doc Hopper is Chris Pierce, their singer/guitarist. He plays drums and does some singing for Sinkhole.

F&E Would you ever use the video medium to get your songs out (relating back to the question about getting everyone to hear a song like "Tumble Mat" and also to the obvious MTV slag in the song "Alterna Hunka Shit")?

Yes, I'm definitely interested in using the video medium to expose our music to people and I think we'll probably try to make a video for a song off the next Sinkhole album. There's a ton of regional and local cable video shows that play punk and underground videos and I'm sure those shows have some good-sized viewerships. As far as MTV goes, they're absolutely the worst TV station in the history of television and I'd feel pretty shitty if a video of mine was helping to draw viewers to a channel with programming as loathsome as "Singled Out" and "The Real World." So in other words, if we do shoot a video, we most likely will not be sending it to MTV.



Thatcher Ulrich—Bass, Vocals

Eliot Shepard—Guitar, Vocals

F&E I noticed the theme about killing ("Spooze", "Sit and Stare") and just a general evilness ("Evil Twin") coming into play on "Space Freak", that really wasn't evident on your earlier works? What's going on? Are you guys ok, do you own guns?

No guns. We're o.k., just revolting a little against the sickeningly sweet lyrics of most of the pop-punk stuff you hear now.

F&E What do you have planned for Ringing Ear Records in 1996? For Sinkhole in 1996? And how do you manage your time between band, label, and whatever else you might find time for in your life?

By the time this is published, we should have 4 new releases out on Ringing Ear: A 7" by Huff, a new band from Burlington, VT; a New Sweet Breath 7"; an A.G.'s CD called This Earth Sucks that's got all 3 7"s and the Cirkus Berzerkus full-length on it (The A.G.'s was the band that a bunch of us from Sinkhole and Doc Hopper used to be in), and a Ringing Ear sampler CD called Flex Your Specs that's got songs from every R.E. release. As far as Sinkhole goes, as I said, we'll be recording a new album in February that should be out in the spring, then we're going to try to do a US tour in June with New Sweet Breath, and after that, who knows.

Yeah, managing time can be tough, but I've found it to be a lot easier now that I've quit my cumbersome day job. Of course, eating is one of those things I try to find time for in my life so we'll see how long the no day job thing lasts...



Photo by Scallen