

Barsuk Records -- pronounced bar-SUKE by those in the know (it's a Russian word that means 'badger,' and is the name of the dog that appears in the label's logo) -- is perhaps most recognized for having put out the first several albums by **Death Cab for Cutie**, the last of which, the classic *Transatlanticism* (2003), is one of very few indie albums to have sold the half-million copies required to be certified Gold in the United States, and which, along with the three other DCfC studio albums and a handful of EP and archival releases in the Barsuk catalog, continues to be a touchstone of Northwest indie rock. (Death Cab, incidentally, released *Narrow Stairs* in the spring of 2008 -- their second album on major label Atlantic -- which debuted at #1 on the Billboard 200 albums chart and has received near-universal critical praise.)

Death Cab's success both on and off the indie, however, is hardly the only noteworthy musical achievement from Barsuk's 10-year history, during which the label has released music by a startling array of many of the most acclaimed artists in indiedom, including **Nada Surf, Menomena, Mates of State, Ra Ra Riot, Say Hi, David Bazan, The Long Winters, Viva Voce, Rocky Votolato, John Vanderslice, Jesse Sykes, They Might Be Giants,** and **Rilo Kiley**, alongside a handful of younger bands such as **Aqueduct, Jim Noir**, and others. Not bad for a label started as a hobby that remains to this day entirely independently owned and operated, outside the financial influence of the major label system!

=====

Here's the story of Barsuk the dog, who was a real and very great canine friend of ours: <http://www.barsuk.com/home/barsuk>

=====

Here's a link to the main Artists page on Barsuk, which is a good starting source page for basic info on all our bands: <http://www.barsuk.com/bands>

=====

And here's a short timeline with a few significant dates:

1991 - Barsuk the dog is born. He's a black lab - pitbull mix, and a sweetie.

1994 - Seattle art-pop quartet **This Busy Monster** records its first 7" single and wants to make it look like it's on a real label, so they create the fake Barsuk Records, named (of course) after their favorite pooch.

1998 - Still a hobby label for TBM bassist Josh Rosenfeld and singer/songwriter Christopher Possanza, boasting a grand total of three 7" single releases in 4 years, Barsuk moves into the CD world. By virtue of having figured out how to press CDs, the band knows much more about the record business than they did in the previous year. In addition to pressing up the debut This Busy Monster full-length, they also offer to help pay for the first CD by Bellingham, WA band **Death Cab for Cutie**, *Something About Airplanes*. The two albums are "released"

without any distribution other than mailorder and local store consignment -- the DCfC album in conjunction with Bellingham lo-fi pop label Elsinor -- and are made available outside of the northwest via Amazon's pilot program.

2000 - Having secured national distribution on the strength of Airplane's sales, Rosenfeld quits his day job to try to make the label a full-time pursuit and to focus his energies on the release of the second DCfC full-length, *We Have the Facts and We're Voting Yes*. Barsuk signs San Francisco songwriting genius **John Vanderslice**, and releases his debut solo album *Mass Suicide Occult Figurines*.

2001 - Barsuk signs **Rilo Kiley** and **The Long Winters**, and experiences its first slap of reality when its distributor, an affiliate of the Valley Media one-stop distribution company, disappears overnight by declaring bankruptcy. The label loses more money than they had ever thought they might make on the sale of CDs, and has to scramble to find new distribution and to not go out of business. Nevertheless, Barsuk's commitment to deluxe (and expensive packaging) remains unchecked.

2002 - What doesn't kill you makes you stronger, apparently. Barsuk survives (mostly because its owners aren't drawing a salary, and the label is run from a house in Seattle's last remaining affordable neighborhood, the so-called Central District). Despite the presence of scary drug-dealing operations run out of two houses across from the label, and an impressive speed-addled methadone addict neighbor with an active case of pyromania, Barsuk builds back its finances and continues to thrive. The label moves into offices in Georgetown.

2003 - In a watershed year, Barsuk signs a couple new bands and releases only four albums, each of which seems to be an instant classic and all of which appear on several critics' year-end-best lists: *Reckless Burning*, by **Jesse Sykes & The Sweet Hereafter**; *Nada Surf's Let Go*; **The Long Winters' When I Pretend to Fall**, and **Death Cab's Transatlanticism**.

2005 - With sales booming despite the growing internet-driven cultural shift making the record industry at large very nervous, Barsuk has continued to grow. Death Cab signs to Atlantic Records, a transaction that not only makes Barsuk's owners proud of the fact that, unlike the standard indie-band-leaves-indie-label-in-a-cloud-of-resentment-and-ugliness narratives that have played out countless times, they are still buddies with Death Cab. Plus, Barsuk makes a good amount of money on the deal to invest in more growth, Death Cab is happy with their new label, and everybody wins. Barsuk's staff increases to 10 people, adding releases from **Mates of State**, **Aqueduct**, **Travis Morrison**, and **They Might Be Giants** to the catalog. **Travis Morrison's** brilliant indie-rock masterpiece *Travistan* gets a 0.0 rating on the taste-making Pitchfork website, a distinction that he and the label wear with pride, knowing that his art will be vindicated someday by popular opinion.

2006 - With sales beginning to get tough across the record business, Barsuk's unusual business model (in which the label and bands share profits from their releases and quality art takes precedent over bottom-line considerations) continues to bear fruit despite the fact that a disturbing portion of the record-buying public believes that record labels are evil and that recorded music should be free. **Rocky Votolato** releases his landmark *Makers* on Barsuk to start off the year, and Portland duo **Viva Voce**, Oklahoma pop experimentalists **Starlight Mints**, Seattle teen sister duo **Smooch**, and the geography-defying Austin band **What Made Milwaukee Famous** join the roster. Barsuk releases the acclaimed debut album by UK bedroom pop master **Jim Noir** for the first time in the US.

2007 - *Transatlanticism* sells its 500,000th copy in the US, becoming one of the only indie releases to reach this landmark in the internet era (and perhaps becoming the first release to hit the landmark on a label operating under a profit-split model... let us know if you think of any others!). Again, the year starts with a bang as Barsuk releases the anticipated *Friend and Foe* album by Portland collective **Menomena**, and longtime Pedro the Lion frontman (and one of the best songwriters working in the English language) **David Bazan** joins the Barsuk family. *Friend and Foe* is nominated for a Grammy award for its brilliant packaging design by Portland artist Craig Thompson. Barsuk releases the soundtrack to the acclaimed documentary *Kurt Cobain: About A Son*, and, as vinyl LPs magically begin to regain popularity, the vinyl-and-MP3-only **Steve Fisk/Ben Gibbard** score to the film.

2008 - With more impressively-packaged (and, as always, beautifully written and performed) albums from roster staples like **Nada Surf** and **Mates of State**, in addition to the debut solo album from DCfC founder **Chris Walla** and **Menomena** drummer Danny Seim's other art band **Lackthereof**, Barsuk releases the first album from indie sensations **Ra Ra Riot**, which quickly becomes one of the label's top-selling releases even as the record business continues to struggle industry-wide.

2009 - With **Ra Ra Riot** continuing its ongoing touring of North America, selling out larger venues with each passing tour, Barsuk prepares for another year of excellent releases, starting by proudly finding itself as the first record label trusted enough by DIY-stalwart one-man-band **Say Hi** to release one of his records, the astounding piece of post-new-wave pop perfection called *Oohs & Aahs*. This spring look for **Viva Voce's** *Rose City* and **The Wooden Birds** *Magnolia* (the new project from American Analog Set founder/songwriter Andrew Kenny). The rest of 2009 will include releases by David Bazan, Mates of State (a vinyl-only 12" vinyl remix project), Rocky Votolato, The Long Winters, Starlight Mints, Menomena, and more surprises!