

Blue Swan took cues from Rise Records, which allows Dance Gavin Dance to create freely, and keeps a low overhead.

"You don't need that many people," Swan says. "With building a huge infrastructure ... your goals have to be centered around maintaining the money to keep the infrastructure going. That wouldn't support my whole goal, which is to put out good bands and give them a shot."

Swan doesn't mess with major labels. CD sales have tanked, and the big players are trading mass distribution for a larger cut. Enter the "360 deal," where labels get a piece of everything, including album, tour and merchandise sales.

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Will Swan
founder, Blue Swan Records

Blue Swan only collects CD revenue, with no less than 50 percent given to the artist, he says. It's a contrast with the standard practice. Most bands he knows negotiate for 14 to 20 percent. The label takes the rest.

"It used to be that a label would just take CD sales and also have a couple merch-exclusive designs," Swan says. "You

could make money off your touring, and that would sustain a really good living. ... And now it's become harder, especially for young bands that are trying to build an audience."

Outside of Rise, Dance Gavin Dance had its share of false promises and fine print. Swan wouldn't disclose the parties involved, but the experiences forced him to learn the business side of the music.

"There's so many people trying to get a little bit of your pie," he says. "Some of them want to actually benefit your career, and some of them are just in it for themselves and can talk really well ... It's a constant battle trying to figure out who's actually legit and incorporating them into your team."


After three years of waiting for the right band, Swan formed the label in 2013. He follows particular tastes: he used to hate power chords, isn't into guitar solos, and prefers full-length albums over singles and music that he feels pushes boundaries.

That year, he met Medina, a young, virtuoso guitarist whose band Stolas had no following. But his demo, *Living Creatures*, was a perfect debut: melodically hectic and complex. Blue Swan Records has had around 20 releases since then, with Royal Coda and Eidola projects due this year.

Swan says he prefers the sparse release schedule. He can put more money into recordings, fund music videos and give his artists the major-label treatment. It's about filling the well with better music.

"If it makes some money for some of my friends. Then I'm doing some good," Swan says. "These guys are getting a shot to be successful, that maybe they wouldn't have had. ... And they get to get to be a positive influence musically." □

M'STER LEWIS

 **LISTEN TO: "REBUILDING THE CULTURE"**

M'ster Lewis makes music, videos, food and clothes with **love for black people**. With melodic and groove-centered songs such as "I Gotcha" and "Rebuilding The Culture," he's about empowering and uplifting others. In the community, M'ster Lewis works with the Yisrael Family Farm in Oak Park and the African Market in South Sacramento, where he teaches kids how to write positive lyrics and produce videos. *Rebuilding The Culture PT 2* is the first of three albums he'll release soon, a powerful look at the life of the hip-hop artist, vegan, business owner and activist.

CONSCI8US

 **LISTEN TO: "IT'S BIGGER THAN ME"**

Consci8us is an inspirational emcee focused on using **music, media and education to create positive narratives** by "making consci8us cool." With songs including "Freedom" and "Black Lives Shatter," Consci8us could be your favorite rapper's favorite rapper. His faith and close proximity with the community are big reasons why he's been gaining momentum over the past year, performing at the California State Fair, the 2018 and 2019 MLK March, Sacramento State, UC Davis and the Golden 1 Center.

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