

Setting the standards

A small army of powerful record company interests recently formed the DVD-Audio Council, a group designed to ensure that the industry develops uniform technological standards. Last week I received a digital press release informing me that between them, members would be releasing some 70 DVDs before the holiday season. It is, among other things, an announcement that the corporate music industry's step into the market is, at this point, a step forward for the consumer. A number of small indie outfits, like Pennsylvania's Music Video Distributors, have been active in the music marketplace for at least a few years. "We've been doing this for a long time," vice president Ed Seaman told me recently. "That gives us a real advantage. We used to have the marketplace more to ourselves, but we know that marketplace like no one else."

Companies like MVD can play a role roughly analogous to indie record labels. Certainly MVD is releasing some outstanding material – including *Sublime: Stories, Tales, Lies, and Exaggerations*, soon to be put out in a reworked, special edition. The death of guitarist-singer Brad Nowell in 1996 at the peak of the band's popularity, shortly before the release of their third album, left a rabid West Coast-based cult hungry for more. The DVD, featuring live footage and recent interviews, is energized by an on-the-fly energy that was the band's trademark.

Watching it doesn't bring Nowell back as much as it underscores his absence. But if you were a fan, like I was, it's as close as you're ever going to get, and it's decidedly more satisfying than the many bootlegs and posthumous releases available. The MVD catalog is full of good material, with work by bands like Dream Syndicate, the Residents, Tower of Power, Joe Cocker, and dozens of others.

Watch it

Favorite CD-DVD packages and DVDs

If I Should Fall from Grace: The Shane McGowan Story, DVD (Music Video Distributors) Shane McGowan, the legendary hard-living Pogue, has fallen from everything else, so give him time. "It was Christmas Eve / In the drunk tank, babe ..." he sings on "Fairytale in New York," as unforgettably sad and appropriate a song as could be. It hurts to watch, but it's great.