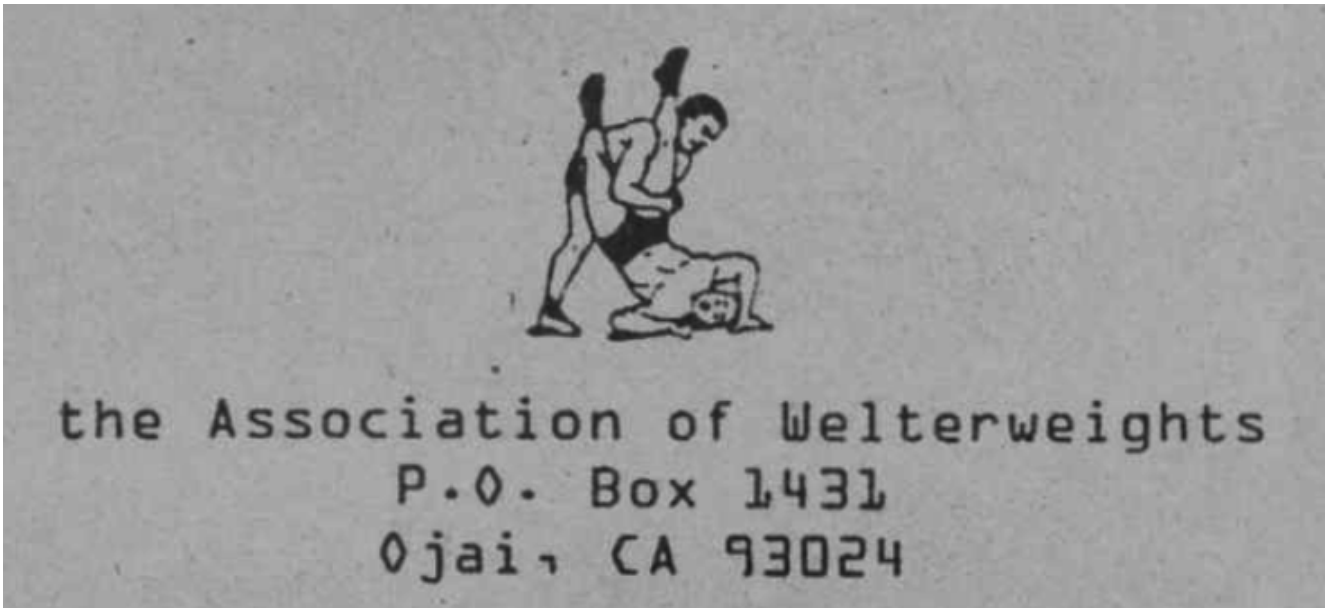
The Association of Welterweights Records Interview

The Association of Welterweights Records was a short lived record label from Ojay, California that existed from 1998 to 2000. Throughout it's existence it worked with A Sometimes Promise (members of Embassy, Ochre, Stratego, Manumission, Incurable Complaint and A Nation of Lepers), Eighteen Visions, Bleeding Through, Throwdown, Carry On, Adamantium, Death By Stereo and a ton more local California bands. Hopefully this short interview will help to document a label that worked with so many great bands and left behind a documentation of what California hardcore and emo was about in the late 90's.

- AWW01 A Sometimes Promise discography CD (September 1998)
- AWW02 As the Sun Sets – A Southern California Hardcore Compilation (late 1999)



The Association of Welterweights Records logo

-Hello Graham. First of all thank you for taking the time to

do this interview! Were you born right in California? Do you still live there today? In the booklet for "As the Sun Sets" you wrote that you couldn't imagine yourself living anywhere else. Do you still feel the same?

I was. I actually live 5 blocks from the hospital I was born in. I've lived in NYC and SF amongst other places, but I really couldn't imagine living anywhere else permanently.

-What was your first hardcore show?

I honestly don't remember. When I was younger I went to a few parties where punk bands played but no one memorable. My first bigger show was a show called "Punk Show '95." It was at a brand new amphitheater called the Glen Helen Blockbuster Pavilion that wasn't fit to handle the crowd. The lineup included Sublime, Straightfaced, D.I., the Vandals, Guttermouth, Youth Brigade, Face to Face, and a bunch more. It ended up in a full scale police riot. I was still pretty young, but I remember people ripping the plastic seats out of the concrete and throwing them at security. Bottles were flying, cops were beating people up…. it was wild.

-California has one of my favorite hardcore bands ever; Eighteen Visions. What was it like growing up in that scene? What were your favorite bands back then?

18 Visions were well before their time, Yesterday is Time Killed was a brilliant record. The scene back then was great, although I'm a bit out of touch with what things are like now so I don't know what to compare it to, but I really appreciated the sense of community that seems to be lacking nowadays. I made a lot of great friends through hardcore back then, many of whom I see all the time still. I actually ate lunch with Ken Floyd just yesterday. As far as favorite bands go, it's hard to say because that changed over time. Unbroken, Inside Out, Embrace, Fugazi, Gorilla Biscuits, etc

all were big influences on me and I still consider them relevant. As far as bands that were around back in the 90's/00's though? Carry On's "A Life Less Plagued" is a phenomenal record that goes overlooked. Amber Inn's "All Roads Lead Home" LP on Ebullition still gets me. Avail's "4 AM Friday" is still a banger. Disembodied's "Diablerie" is still one of the heaviest hardcore records ever. I could go on and on.

-Prior to starting the record label, what were your implications in the hardcore scene? Did you put up shows or create merch? I read that some people from The Association did some zines? Can you elaborate on that?

I was always active and trying to do stuff for the scene I guess. I booked shows occasionally. I did a few zines back in the day. The first was called "Blacklist", I did 4 issues of that. Then I did a zine called "Ralph." I think I did 2 issues of that? I don't remember. They were photos, interviews, the occasional opinion piece, some reviews, etc. I did some reviews and such for HeartattaCk. I used to take a lot of photos back then, and I toured with a few bands.

-Did you operate the Hardcore Shirt Distro? Can you explain how you operated that?

Yeah we tried that. Terrible idea, although if you look at the success of something like Bigcartel now, I'd say I was a genius operating before his time. Lolz. Yeah, we just sold some shirts online and lost money doing it.

-You also had a photo gallery as part of the website. Were you a photographer or was it for others to share their pictures? The site is now down and I have no way to see what was on it, so feel free to explain all this.

Yeah I was a photographer back then, although I sort of stopped when digital photography came around. Some of the photos ended up in zines, others in records… But I wanted to

do something to share a bunch of the photos with people who were interested in them, so I put up a gallery.

-Who came up with the name “The Association of Welterweights”? It doesn’t exactly sound like a record label! What’s the story behind it?

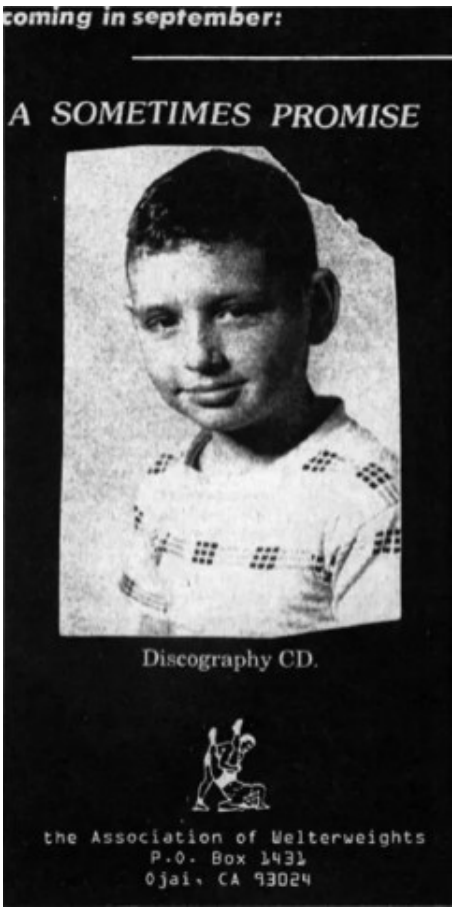
My friend JR came up with it. I dont recall the exact thought process but I loved the sound of it. I think it had something to do with the fact that we knew we’d never amount to being a big time “heavyweight” label.

-How many people were behind The Association, and who were they? How had you met each of them?

It was mainly me, and my buddy Drew to a much lesser extent, although there were a few other guys who were involved and had input.

A Sometimes Promise discography CD,

September 1998



Add from HeartattaCk advertising the A Sometimes Promise discography CD, 1998

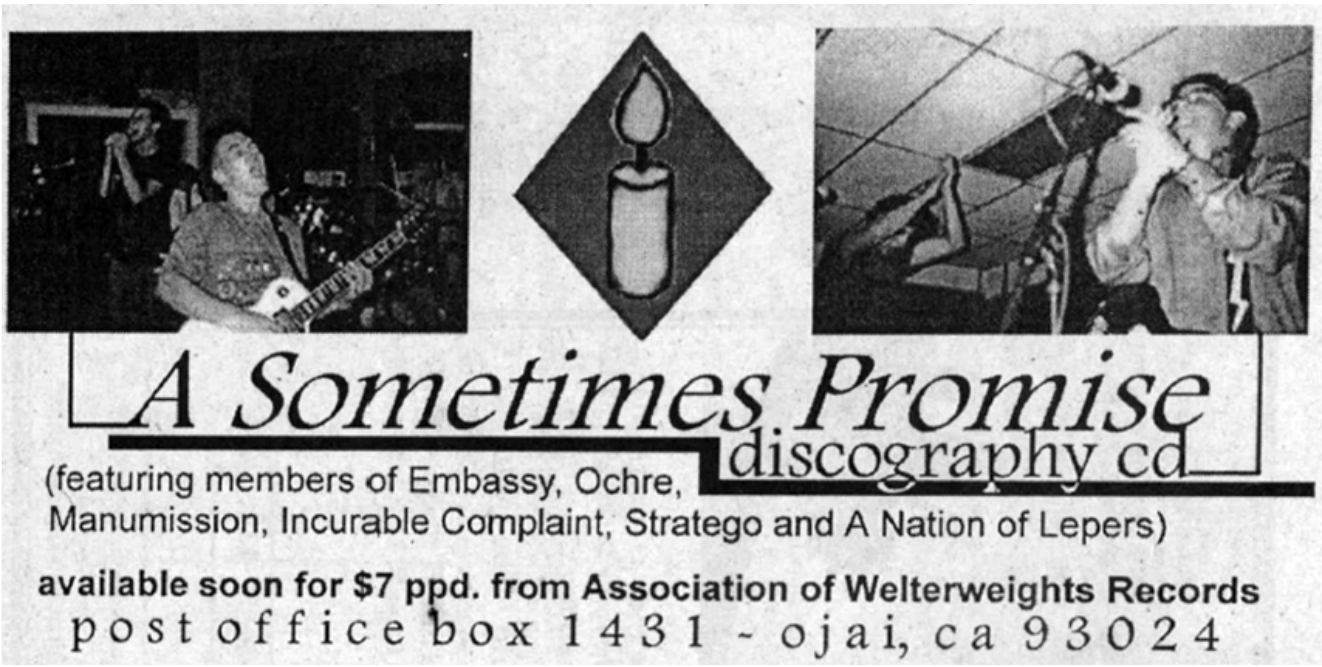
-You credited A Sometimes Promise as the inspiration to start the record label. Were there other labels that you looked up to and made you want to take this route to document the scene?

> That band was fantastic, and I wish their record came even remotely close to relaying their live energy. Hard not to like them, I wish they just kept with it. As far as labels go, I always respected Indecision Records. Dave Mandel is a phenomenal human and a straight forward dude. I was a vocal opponent to both Throwdown, Bleeding Through, and Terror signing with Trustkill records (Indecision was one of the options for Terror back in the day) but that dude lured everyone in with money and promises. Ebullition always kept it real.

-How long had A Sometimes Promise been broken up when talk

started about putting together their discography CD? How long did it take to put the whole thing together?

> I honestly couldn't tell you. Brett did a lot of the leg work. I had to learn a lot from Mandel about getting stuff made.



Add from HeartattaCk advertising the A Sometimes Promise discography CD, 1998

-How many CDs were pressed? Did the ex-band members help out with the promotion of the CD?

> Maybe 1000? Not in the least, the band was totally an afterthought for most of the guys by the time the record came out.

-How did you raise money to put out this first release?

> My partner Drew came up with the funding.

-The second release from the label was the massive compilation "As the Sun Sets – A Southern California Hardcore Compilation". When did you start putting this idea together? Was the Sometimes Promise CD out already?

I don’t remember the timeline, I think they were both in the works at the time.

AWW02 As the Sun Sets – A Southern California Hardcore Compilation, CD late 1999

-The compilation regroups a seriously impressive roster of bands: 7 Day War, Adamantium, Amendment 18, Burning Dog, Carry On, Collision, Countervail, Death By Stereo, Dirty Dirt & the Dirts, Eighteen Visions, Eyelid, Fuck You, Ignite, Life’s Halt, No Reply, Palpatine, Show of Hands, Stickfigurecarousel, The Missing 23rd, Throwdown and Wrench. Can you go over how you got some of these bands on the compilation? Maybe each has an interesting story?

Every one of those bands were bands I had personally watched over the preceding year or so. Some of them had new songs to record, others didn't, but I just approached each band about doing it. A lot of them were friends and everyone was really excited about the idea of showcasing our great scene, so everyone was happy about it. 18V couldn't give me any of their new stuff (that later went on the No Time For Love 7″) because Josh was a dickwad, so we had to use "Raping.Laughing.Tasting.Temptation" off Yesterday is Time Killed. The backups on the Carry On song are like 3 of us just looped a bunch of times. Adamantium recorded that song just before the band's lineup changed, so they probably played that song maybe once or twice ever live. I dunno, I could come up with a million of these but I think they'd all qualify as shinfo.

-How long did it take you to compile all these songs? Most of them were not exclusive, was this an agreement with the bands from the start? Did you pay for any of the studio time for these bands?

I don't remember. 6 months? I really have no idea. I asked if they had newer stuff, or if they wanted, they could record something new. Some bands couldn't because their labels were assholes. Some just didn't have any new material. Those who had something new to record tried, those who didn't, didn't. I paid a minimal amount for a few like Adamantium and Throwdown. Carry On I paid for. I don't remember the rest.

-How many copies have been pressed over time of this release?

As far as copies are concerned, I think it was 2000?

-The booklet of this compilation was actually pretty impressive. A lot of samplers and compilations at the time barely even included contact information. But you had a decent sized picture for almost every band, the lyrics, the band

line-up and the contact info, on a sixteen page booklet. Money was obviously not an issue! You really went out of your way to document the scene. What was your inspiration for going this far?

> We didn’t want to put out a shitty sampler as a marketing tool. We wanted to put out a record that was worth purchasing. The cost was significant, but we weren’t trying to make a profit… We just wanted to recoup our money while helping document and promote our scene.

-At the time you were also distributing two more releases, on top of the two Association CDs. The last Embassy LP, which was members of A Sometimes Promise, but also the Worse Than Celibate demo. Who was Worse Than Celibate and how come you distributed their demo?

> The Embassy LP I had copies of from Capra I think. Worse Than Celibate was a shitty punk band a few of us were in that we had laying around.

-After the compilation, there was great talk of The Association releasing the Show of Hands full-length album in 2000. The band then decided to go with Prime Directive Records instead and ultimately the album never came out at all. Now that years have passed and the band is long forgotten, what’s the real story behind what happened there? How close did this come to happening? Can you remember what their album was going to be called?

> Show of Hands never released anything on Prime Directive, the Show of Hands record never materialized because the band broke up and never wrote the material.

-Another release that The Association of Welterweights was supposed to release was Bleeding Through’s debut on EP. They weren’t on As the Sun Sets compilation, having only recorded material afterwards. Can you remember how you first heard of them? What was your impression the first time you saw/heard

them play?

I was at their first show, although I don't remember the particulars. I'd known several of the guys prior to the band and Brandon gave me the demo when it was on cassette. I thought it was phenomenal and knew instantly they would blow up.

-The Bleeding Through release has some confusing information. Apparently, The Association of Welterweights was supposed to release their first EP on CD (some sources mention that it was going to be on 7″ vinyl, but I've been able to find no valid sources, I guess you'll validate that). Bleeding Through also ended up going with Prime Directive Records (the second band to make this switch), by which time they had enough songs written to do a full-length album. That got released as "Dust to Ashes" on CD. How close did this release come to happening on The Association of Welterweights? Can you recall if it was going to be titled "Dust to Ashes" when you were still in discussion? What's the real story behind this release not happening?

I hit up Bleeding Through about doing a full length after hearing the demo. Brandon was hyped on the idea, but they already had committed to doing a 7″ with Chase (Prime Directive). By the time they got into the studio to record the 7″, they had enough for Dust to Ashes, and Chase wanted to put all of it out, so he did. After that record came out, they blew up and Mandel also wanted to work with them. I totally understood, Indecision was huge at that time, and was a legit label. I was just their friend who put out two records. No animosity, that stuff happens all the time. Although I'm not friends with Brandon anymore, I am still friends with most of the old BT guys (and girls). I actually was their roadie for a while, we did their first tour together with Eighteen Visions in 2001 right after Dust to Ashes came out. The tour ended at Hellfest, which was supposed to be Earth Crisis' last show. Burn It Down played

their last show then also, that fest was amazing.

-How did you first of of No Choice In This Matter, the band from Tokyo, Japan? You announced on the website that you really wanted to work with them. How far in the discussions did this get?

I emailed them. I reviewed a CD of theirs for HeartattaCk and I loved them. I was a sucker for Youth Crew back then. But I started to lose interest in the label.

-Other than the three previously mentioned bands that almost happened, can you remember other bands you wanted to work with and had exchanges with the members?

Avenged Sevenfold sent me their demo CD wanting to work with me. File that one under “missed opportunities.”

-Other than the two CDs, did The Association press any merch for any other bands, under the label imprint?

Nope

-One thing that I noticed was that you went all out when came time to distribute the releases of The Association of Welterweights. You had distribution through Stratagem, Ebullition, Revelation, No Idea, Very, Lumberjack and Insound. The releases were everywhere, how did you manage this so early on in the label’s career?

Well Ebullition and Revelation were both located in Socal, so that was super easy. Kent and Lisa (Ebullition) were probably at more than 1/2 of the total A Sometimes Promise Shows, and I knew a few people at Rev at the time. But I honestly don’t remember the rest.

-The Association Mission Statement, posted on your old website in 2000 read as so “The Association is an equal opportunity organization whose goal is to through positive advancement, eliminate all negative attitudes such as racism, sexism,

homophobia, and elitism through presenting the general population with music that inspires, informs, and acts as an outlet of positive expression, rather than as a money-making scheme. We believe that hardcore is more than a simple opportunity to rock out; rather, it provides an open forum for the communication of ideas and the chance for individuals to express themselves." Do you feel the label accomplished all it stood for? If you had to look back, is there anything you would have done different?

> Ahhhaha I don't feel like we accomplished anything, other than hopefully preserving some music that was important to people at that time. We definitely didn't make money.

-How, when and why did The Association end? Have you considered releasing more records under a different record label name since then?

> It tapered off. Drew went to college on the East Coast, and I got tired of it. I was doing more photo stuff and went on the road a few times. The label started out a hobby, but it eventually turned into a very poor paying job, which is always the sign that you need a new hobby.