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Greencastle, Indiana · Thursday, June 10, 2010

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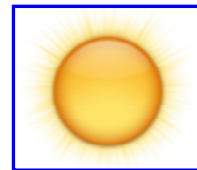
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Film explores the loss of local culture

Saturday, June 5, 2010

By JARED JERNAGAN, Music Critic

In the classic model of a good music "scene," we tend to focus on the venues -- bars, clubs, coffee houses. A good music scene has to have good places to go and actually hear



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live music.

But there has always been another element to it. There are those places we can go to discover new, unfamiliar music, even when it isn't Saturday night.

A music scene needs a place to talk about music, to promote new stuff and discover the old tunes that paved the way.

The other cog in this wheel was always the record store.

"I Need That Record!: The Death (Or Possible Survival) of the Independent Record Store" celebrates the culture of the independent music store while pondering the factors that have led to the decline of these havens for artistic expression and independent thought.

Filmmaker Brendan Toller has made a film that's a lot like the shops it celebrates -- unpolished, scrappy, earnest. It's truly a labor of love.

The film has been promoted largely on the artists interviewed for the production -- Thurston Moore of Sonic Youth, Mike Watt of the Minutemen, Patterson Hood of Drive-By Truckers. However, the real teeth of the story come from the independent record storeowners interviewed as their stores are closing and in the aftermath.

The footage of the closings of record stores Trash American Style and Records Express are documented in great detail, with extensive interviews of the owners during the stores' final days as well as months afterward.

The overwhelming sense among the owners as well as their customers is that the closing of a local record shop, or any locally owned business for that matter, is losing a piece of the community.

In the end, it isn't so much about the product that is moved in these locations, it's about the ideas shared and the bonds formed.

In the end, we see former shop owners take two different paths after the closing of their stores.

In the case of Ian from Records Express, he has chosen to pick up the pieces and move on to a different phase of his life.

He works at a Trader Joe's, where he occasionally sees his former customers and laments the loss of their little piece of the world.

For Malcolm from Trash American Style, it becomes a battle to keep the dream alive, even if it's in a different, less satisfying form. Even after the actual store closes, he keeps the business alive, taking it on the road to college campuses and doing

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whatever he has to do until the next opportunity comes along.

He closes the movie with simple, sound advice for all dreamers and artists: "Never give up."

Along the way, though, this movie is about a lot more than two record stores that no longer exist.

It isn't even about the various record storeowners profiled who are still making a go of it. Instead, it's a microcosm of problems so many see in the American business system in the 21st century.

Even as communities like Greencastle promote buy local campaigns, it seems more and more is owned by fewer and fewer huge companies.

Through the lens of the music industry, "I Need That Record!" explores how the major record labels as well as Clear Channel and MTV have made it difficult to impossible for upstarts to break through.

Local flavor has been silenced and creativity stifled.

Even new technology such as MP3, which will revolutionize the industry if properly harnessed, has been either suppressed or used incorrectly.

Through the artist interviews, it's also a sort of eulogy to the music culture that once existed. The musicians discuss how record stores helped shape who they are and the music they make.

The documentary, which has been screened at more than 25 film festivals, has been available since April 17 (Independent Record Store Day) at independent record stores. It will be available more widely on July 27.

Toller reveals himself to be a fine documentary maker, while animation of Matt Newman calls to mind the Monty Python work of Terry Gilliam.

The film's one shortcoming is in its subtitle, which offers the "possible survival" of the record store. The subject is not addressed in great detail, beyond the "never give up" advice and a discussion of the resurgence of vinyl records.

Overall, though, Toller has made a thought-provoking documentary that should interest record junkies as well as anyone interested in the plight of locally owned business.

Learn more at: inedthatrecord.com or brendantoller.com

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