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STILL HERE AND NOT GIVING UP: The I Need that Record! Documentary

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Reports of the indie record store's demise, though not entirely exaggerated, remain premature as long as there are still crate diggers to champion it.

BY RON HART

Although technically I should count Modell's Shopping Center or Times Square Stores as such on a literal level, the first *proper* record store I ever went to was a converted burger joint called Titus Oaks on Old Country Road in Westbury, Long Island.

I originally started going there with my cousins to rent the old WWF Coliseum home videos, but soon enough I began tagging along with my uncle on his routine runs there to dig through their endless bins of vinyl, thus forever inflicting me with an addiction that might be cheaper and safer than heroin or the crack rock, but harboring an appetite of need that is just as voracious. And nearly 25 years after walking through the doors of my first mom-and-pop shop, my insatiability for that routine run still flows through my veins like so much hemoglobin; which is the exact reason why self-described "guerilla filmmaker" Brendan Toller's critically-lauded documentary *I Need That Record! The Death (or Possible Survival) of the Independent Record Store* (MVD Visual) hit me with an emotional chord normally designated for those abused animal commercials with the Sarah McLachlan bed music.

Over the course of 77 minutes, Toller uses appropriately placed public domain stock footage, old newspaper clips (particularly a great snippet of Public Enemy's Chuck D and Lars Ulrich of Metallica bickering about Napster on *The Charlie Rose Show*), killer animation from Matt Newman, and an eye-popping guest list of pundits including the likes of Thurston Moore, Ian Mackaye, Noam Chomsky, Mike Watt, Lenny Kaye, Talking Heads' Chris Frantz, Glenn Branca, Patterson Hood of the Drive-By Truckers, Black Keys



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drummer Patrick Carney, Of Montreal guitarist BP Helium, legendary rock photographer Bob Gruen and punk scribe Legs McNeil.

Those talking heads are on hand to explain the slow, torturous death of this great American establishment, with over 3,000 indie stores closing across the nation in the past decade. Much of the rhetoric here lays the blame (and rightly so) at the obvious culprits and perpetrators responsible for the demise of those shops: FCC deregulation under the 1996 Telecommunications Act and the resulting (revolting?) rise of corporate FM world-eater Clear Channel in the legislation's wake; MTV; radio payola; CD price gouging and the antagonistic relationship between record labels and consumers; the advent of big box chain stores; and of course the dreaded specter of online file sharing and illegal downloading. And each one of these sociopolitical afflictions most certainly levied a heavy hand in the hobbling of record store culture in the USA.

However, all the finger pointing aside, the film does quite poignantly encapsulate the emotions of shoppers like myself whenever one of our hallowed havens of vinyl does fall prey to the symptoms of the modern age. Particularly moving are the segments where Toller captures the mood of two stores in the process of shuttering their doors - two sorely missed institutions of Connecticut crate digging, Middletown's Record Express and Danbury's Trash American Style - by effectively documenting an equal balance of anger, sadness, nostalgia and uncertainty amidst both the store owners and their longtime patrons. One of the doc's best scenes, in fact, features a defiant Malcolm Tent, who ran Trash American Style out of a Danbury strip mall for 16 years before the landlord decided to revoke their lease to make way for the expansion of the neighboring Minuteman Press, peddling vinyl on a college campus and, in true punk fashion, spitting a quote from G.G. Allin to the camera undoubtedly aimed at his corporate detractors:

"I'm still here, and I'm not giving up!"

There is a thin thread of optimism does weave itself throughout the context of *I Need That Record!*, validating the parenthetical statement in the flick's subtitle by highlighting the opening of a new punk-and-hardcore shop in CT as well as the prominent profiling of several nationally renowned stores such as Boston's Newbury Comics, Chicago's Reckless Records, Culture Clash in Toledo, OH, and Electric Fetus in Minneapolis, MN, all of which seem to be doing fairly well despite the grim economic climate.

However, the complete blind eye to the many shops in both New York and New Jersey will certainly prove to be quite disheartening to any Tri-Stater viewing this DVD. I mean, come on, Toller has guys who literally define New York City music like Moore, Branca, Kaye and Frantz talking about record

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My Web Poll

Guided By Voices has announced their early/mid '90s incarnation will be touring! What other "classic era" lineup would you like to see tour

- Pavement: Crooked Rain era... oops, never mind.
- The Smiths: original lineup, early 80s
- Rolling Stones: Mick Taylor era, early 70s
- Prince and The Revolution: 1999 era, mid 80s
- Guided By Voices: Gillard and Petkovic era, late
- Palace Brothers/Music: pre-Bonnie Prince Billy, mid 90s
- Spacemen 3: Perfect Prescription era, late 80s
- Roxy Music: Brian Eno era, early 70s
- Monkees: original lineup, mid 60s

shops, yet he doesn't include the likes of Other Music, Kim's Video, Academy Records, Rebel Rebel, A-1 or even the recently departed reggae mecca Jammyland in the film? And that's not even scratching the surface of the dearth of brick-and-mortar shops located beyond the bridges and tunnels of money makin' Manhattan, a veritable hunter's paradise that includes Vintage Vinyl in Fords, NJ, the world famous Princeton Record Exchange in Princeton, Mr. Cheapo's on Long Island, Sound Fix in Brooklyn, Flipside Records and Tapes in Pompton Lakes, NJ, Rhino Records and Jack's Rhythms in New Paltz, NY (a rarity in itself being two successful shops that peacefully co-exist not even a thousand feet from one another), House of Guitars in Rochester, NY... the list can go on and on and on and on. To not have included at least one or two of these establishments here is completely and total heresy in my opinion. But then again, I'm sure there are folks in California, another state teeming with quality record shops that seemed to have been overlooked by the filmmaker, are feeling the same way. To be quite honest, the absence of any NY, NJ or CA presence in this doc really does leave a lingering scent of incompleteness.

Nevertheless, *I Need That Record! The Death (or Possible Survival) of the Independent Record Store*, in all of its imperfections, is a sobering and worthwhile expose documenting the demise of a genuine American institution that will definitely strike a chord with anyone who spent a Saturday afternoon on his or her knees thumbing through a post office bin of dusty old vinyl. Just make sure you stick around for the DVD's entertaining extras, which includes extended interviews with many of the pundits and is well worth sitting through. You get to hear Lenny Kaye reminisce about his first trip to the record shop (Vogel's in Brooklyn, where he picked up 45s of Bobby Darin's "Queen of the Hop" and Sheb Wooley's "The Purple People Eater") and Thurston Moore talking about his first concert as a kid (a solo show by Rick Wakeman of Yes, oddly enough) and discovering The Stooges, Can and Amon Düül by way of the cut-out bin at his local Woolworth's.

- Grand Funk Railroad: Farner, Brewer, Schacher lineup, late 60s
- Neil Young and Crazy Horse: Ragged Glory era, late 80s
- Pussy Galore: Spencer and Hagerty era, mid 80s
- Royal Trux: Hagerty and Herrema era, early 90s
- Hole: any lineup as long as it includes Eric Erlandson
- M.I.A.: back when she wasn't so goddam obnoxious

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