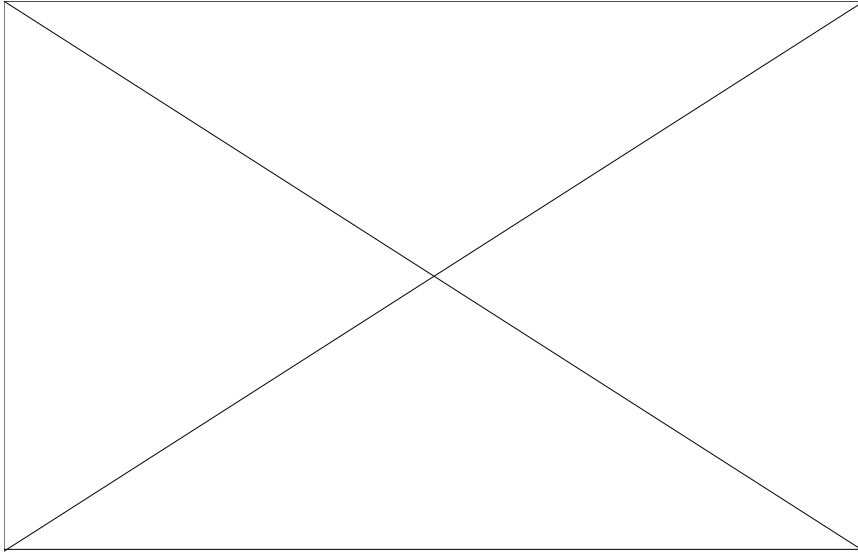


fake chinese rubber plant

when i hear the word "culture" i reach for my laptop

I Need That Record!

By [Kevin](#) on April 19th, 2010



I want to use the blog today to call your attention to a new documentary that's streaming in its entirety (77 mins.) this week on *Pitchfork's* web site: *I Need That Record! The Death (Or Possible Survival) of the Independent Record Store*, posted on Record Store Day (Saturday, April 17). The film is directed, written, and edited by Brendan Toller.

I've embedded a player at top for you to watch it: but I believe that by midnight on Friday, April 23, it will turn back into a pumpkin. Gone. When the free stream "dries up," you can pre-order it for just \$11.21 [here](#), and you oughta. It will be released to DVD on July 27.

You should watch it; you should also be disappointed with it. (And here, this starts to sound like Kevin's blog!) What I liked: *I Need That Record!* made me realize how much I do miss the record stores of my youth, and how grateful I am that [Rhino Records](#), in Claremont, CA, is just five blocks from my office. Indeed, Yo La Tengo—*Yo La Freakin' Tengo!*—played in-store on Saturday to celebrate Record Store Day. This in a town of 37,780. Not too shabby. Meanwhile, I had the Hobson's choice of hearing Yo La Tengo, or attending Coachella, or participating in the Experience Music Project's annual Pop Conference in Seattle. Can't really lose in that situation: can't really win, either.

I also liked the film's David & Goliath plot arc, even if it is a bit tired. I'm still silly enough that I'd rather buy the new David Byrne/Fat Boy Slim at Rhino than at Best Buy,

even if it costs me a few bucks more. And I'd ordinarily rather order something more recherche from Rhino, and wait a few days, and pay a bit more, than do the same thing at Amazon.com. (Ordinarily: I broke my own rule this weekend, in a fit of passion. More about that in Wednesday's post.) This thread of the film ties it to others like *Wal*Mart: The High Cost of Low Prices*; indeed, both films figure Wal*Mart as something of the villain, and with good reason. *I Need That Record!* examines "why over 3,000 independent record stores have closed across the U.S. in the past decade"; if Wal*Mart is only part of the reason, it's a big part.

What's not to like: well, these will be a bit more controversial, I expect. One, I'm not a vinyl fetishist. I love music; I don't "love" any particular music delivery system, and would think such love misplaced. Devotees of the vinyl LP will claim that it sounds "warmer"; my description of that same, very noticeable sonic phenomenon would be "scratchy," or "full of surface noise" ("surface noisy"?). I can live without that warmth; it's a blanket of white noise between my big ears and the music.

Vinyl fetishists (not to be confused with latex fetishists, or leather fetishists) will also wax lyrical (*wax!* get it?!) about the aesthetic benefits of the 12" x 12" cover art, liner notes, and sometimes gatefolds of LPs; this is a harder argument to gainsay, though for me, the wealth of collateral information available on the Web more than compensates for the small form-factor of CD jewel-case booklets. I wrote something more detailed about this in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* some time back; maybe I'll reprise that on fakechineserubberplant.com sometime soon, when I need a break.

A second (and for now, final) argument with *I Need That Record!*: actually, it's an argument with Glenn Branca. Though since Toller gives him so much air time I guess I've really got a beef with Toller, too. "See, the thing is, art has *never* been about mass culture," Branca pontificates. "Ever." One word, Glenn: Shakespeare. (I know, I know: Branca may be depending on the captious distinction between "mass culture" and "popular culture." To use one of Branca's favorite critical terms, that distinction is bullshit.) "The moment you start talking about money," Branca continues, "you're talking about—I mean, to be brutally honest—crime. Criminals; bastards; thieves. Criminals are attracted to money." So that, I suppose, only the independently wealthy ought to be allowed to make art? Who does that leave us: James Merrill, Paris Hilton, and Jakob Dylan?

There are other things to quibble with, including, foremost, the writing: and I'm not just talking about the clumsy parenthetical in the subtitle. Literally the first words we hear in the narration are, "For some, the independent record store was just another place. But to many, it was more." Delivered with what would have to be called *Star Trek* drama. You might be tempted to stop the stream at 0:34, but don't: it's better at showing than telling.