

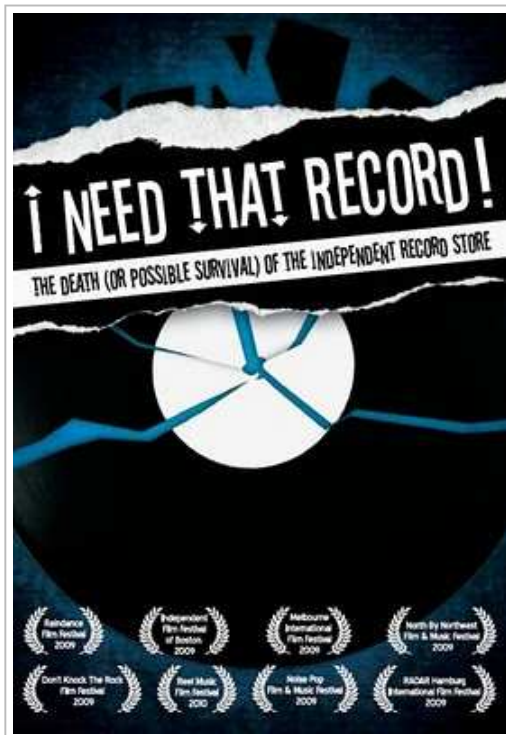
FFanzeen: Rock'n'Roll Attitude With Integrity

Through the writings and photography of Robert Barry Francos, a view of the arts and culture, including everyday life.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2010

DVD Review: "I Need That Record!"

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Film images from the Internet



I Need That Record!: The Death (or Possibly Survival) of the Independent Record Store

Directed, produced and written by Brendan Toller

See of Sound, 2009

77 minutes, USD \$14.95

Ineedthatrecord.com

Seeofsound.com

MVDvisual.com

We all know of an indie record store that has closed, such as Jennifer Flynn's Home of the Hits in Buffalo, NY (*nee* Play It Again Sam's) and Friday Night Dave Olka's Record Mine, in Kenmore, NY. They were places to meet with friends, get a few lessons (be it historical or what was new on the shelves) from fellow collectors and/or lovers of music,

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or just to spend some time browsing and checking the racks on one's own. The local stores are suffering and shuttering throughout the land, and this process is the focus of the documentary *I Need That Record!*, including places in Connecticut, Nashville, Minnesota, Dayton, and Chicago.

Let's start with form. Using lots of interviews with store owners and workers, musicians, and various fans (mostly male, apparently), director Brendan Toller does quite well in taking the focus off of himself (unlike, say, Michael Moore) and places it squarely on the topic at hand (you only hear his voice as narrator and interviewer). He uses stock footage and animation that tends to be manipulated and animated in quite amusing fashions, as well as original art by Matt Newman; he uses these to presents a ton of facts and numbers, without any of it being preachy or distracting, and more importantly it is never boring. Also flowing throughout is a solid soundtrack, including the DVD title by The Tweeds, a few by the Black Keys (including in-store live footage), and the Kinks' appropriate "I'm Not Like Everybody Else," the latter clearly geared toward the mentality of the collector.

I took notes during the entire DVD and ended up with a few pages, which I won't repeat here much, but just know that it's mind-blowing to see just how manipulated the whole independent record store genre is by the major companies and big box corporations. As a collector states here, the big box store fought to close the indie stores, and then were shuttered themselves by changes in technology. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

The storyline is broken up into various sections. The first shows that with the indie stores closing, what is left are mall stores such as Walmart, who carry only top 50 releases. W-m sells 1 out of every 5 CDs sold (they also have a clutch hold on magazines, but I'm digressing again). This process was started by major label's putting "bean counters," as Legs McNeil says herein, in charge of the companies, answering to the stockholder's need for profit, rather than a central company head, or even Board, who will nurture talent. Artist and Development was the first to go, and the performer now is expected to have a hit right off, rather than a steady climb to the top. That's what happened at Sire, with bands like the Dead Boys and DMZ, or at Warner Bros. with Willie Alexander, even back in the '70s. Not selling fast enough? Good-bye. Enter homogenization.

The second section of the documentary deals with the corporate end, including what the record companies are willing to do to promote (or not); for example, Good Charlotte (an overrated band in the so-called mainstream punk vein, like Blink 182 or Green Day...yes, I'm going there) got 250 spins at a station for a payout of \$17,000 by Sony. Clinton did a "Reagan" by passing the Telecommunications Act in 1996 (sometimes good guys do bad things), thereby removing the restrictions on the number of outlets owned by a single company. Before the Act, less than 65 radio stations were owned by major

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About Me

Robert Barry Francos
c/o 62 Timber Ridge Rd,
Commack, NY 11725. From 1977-88, I used to publish a music magazine in New York called FFanzeen, which dealt with the wide-ranging independent music scene. I also photographed many bands from the period (and since). And the beat goes on.

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Tom Bingham's blog

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corporations, and today, Clear Channel alone owns 99.9% of the top 250 markets. That's why you will hear crap like Limbaugh, but Air America went under. Lady Gaga - I mean Gaga - produces "music" that is banal and thumping, and yet is played on every station, or even Good Charlotte types, rather music with any kind of balls like, say, DOA or Anti-Flag (never mind Monty Love or McRackins). No, Clear Channel stations play the same songs 73% of the time*. I've never listened to Justin Bieber (Beiber?) or Lady Gaga, and yet I know their music just from walking through malls, emanating from storefronts, passing cars, newscasts, etc. It's a drowning glut.

The next section contends with the blow to independent music dealt by the launch of MTV in the 1980s. Mike Watt, once of the Minutemen, comments widely on this topic in this film. While he sounds a bit disorientated in his manner, what he is saying is quite smart and is worth paying attention. The selectivity of MTV had a strong effect on what was released; if it couldn't be played on MTV, it wasn't supported, i.e., if the band didn't make a video or it was not accepted on the station, it was not promoted.

Wal-mart leads off the next part. They undermine the indie stores by undercutting them. Music and videos are viewed as loss leader by the chain, to get people into the stores, so if they lose money on the music, they more than make up for it by selling the music player. As Rob Miller, of the indie Bloodshot Records label says here quite well, they are more interested in moving product than defining culture. In some markets, indie stores buy their CDs from big box stores to sell in their own shops, because they can get a better deal from them than with the actual major record companies.

Marketing is another section, describing (in part), how CD prices have been rising, making sheer profit for the labels (it is incredibly less expensive to make CDs over vinyl, but the cost to purchase is so much more). Also explained here is how the computer and MP3s are having a major impact on the larger labels, who sued companies like mp3.com and Napster into freebie non-existence. Despite that, most historic music is ignored by the bigger labels, as 80% of the market sales are through CDs, and yet more than 50% of recorded music is never put on CD.

Here, the opinion of those interviewed varies. For example, Glenn Branca states he likes the value and selection online and buys most of his music that way, but Thurston Moore, of Sonic Youth, calls online buying lonely and boring in comparison to record stores. Lenny Kaye eloquently states that he likes the ease of downloading, but misses the "moment in time" connection of what he is buying. Leg McNeil, in his own "I gotta be different and difficult" manner, states he buys online because he is not interested in "community."

It is here the "possible survival" part comes in, with major labels not being able to cope (yet) with indie releases being so viral, so presently the only place to get them is on-line or at an indie store. With modern

technology, anyone *can* record themselves and sell it. For example, Anthony Kapfer of Brooklyn has been promoting releases by his own bands, such as Kung Fu Grip, quite well without the help of a label; you're likely to find his CDs online or at indie stores, because big box chains are not going to deal with his sales level, but that won't stop him or like-minded musicians like him.

Between these DIY artists and a resurgence in vinyl, which will *not* be found in big box stores, there will be a need for the chance of an indie store revival. Meanwhile, I have found many of the "community" of collectors meeting haphazardly over boxes of vinyl or CDs at garage sales and flea markets (implied in this film). Collectors will find a way, and hopefully, so will the indie stores. As more and more chains fold, such as Tower and Virgin, this may open a vacuum of need for a way to find those hard to locate bands.

I have only touched a tip of what is expressed in *I Need That Record!*, a well made release that should serve as a wake-up call to the way music is distributed, and the tributaries surrounding that output.

The extras are quite interesting, consisting of over two hours of longer interview pieces by people who comment throughout the film, such as DIY do-or-die Ian MacKaye (whose comments about listening to the radio are priceless), Mike Watt, Thurston Moore (who comes across as a sweet guy who you would be likely to meet at a record shop talking over tunes), an annoyingly abrasive Leg McNeil, Lenny Kaye (who I feel said the most heartfelt comments), and an appropriately abrasive chain-smoking Glenn Branca (who helped start the No Wave movement in the late '70s).

Fortunately, there are still many great indie stores out there hanging on, such as House of Guitars in Ironduquoit, NY, Rockit Scientist and Bleecker Bob's in Greenwich Village, Turn it Up! In Northampton, MA, and Vinyl Diner, Vinyl Exchange, and Tramps in Saskatoon.

For me, this documentary made me think of some die-hard record collectors I've known in my life, such as (in no particular order) Bernie Kugel, Mad Louie the Vinyl Junkie, Friday Night Dave, the Doctor of Madness, Joe Viglione, Mike McDowell, Kenne Highland, Tom Bingham, Jeff Tamarkin, Greg Prevost, Cary Baker, Gary Pig Gold, Bruce Farley Mowat, Joe Bonomo, Richie Unterberger, Miriam Linna and Billy Miller, and so many others. We're out there, and we will find each other one way or another.



** In the early '80s, I got into an argument with talk show host / record company exec Jonathan "Everyone's Gone to the Moon" King about what he considered successful radio, which consisted of just this very commonality and replaying of records over and over. I'm sorry to say it looks like she was ahead of his time, and he won.*

Posted by Robert Barry Francos at 5:35 PM 

Labels: [Bernie Kugel](#), [CDs](#), [FFanzeen](#), [Glenn Branca](#), [Ian MacKaye](#), [Indie music](#), [Legs McNeil](#), [Lenny Kaye](#), [Mike Watt](#), [record collecting](#), [Robert Barry Francos](#), [Sonic Youth](#), [Vinyl](#), [Wal-mart](#)

Reactions: interesting (0) cool (0) informative (0)

4 comments:

walter said...

Well don't forget me! It's thanks to your introducing me to record collecting that I have an apartment full of crap, an empty bank account leaving me penniless and destitute and no social life in. Addition to an addiction that borders on being a vinyl crackhead. (Did I mention the pissed off girlfriend?) thanks Robert! !!

All kidding aside...the loss of a record store is tragic. Great article ...and Sandra still won't forgive you for turning me onto "fluffy " by Gloria balsam!

September 18, 2010 2:40 AM

MJG196 said...

Thanks for the review! Just put the doc in my Netflix queue.

September 18, 2010 10:20 AM

MJG196 said...

OK, I just watched it! I agree with your review entirely...I only wish the director would have tightened up the movie a little



bit. A little too much rambling on occasion (yes, Mike Watt).

That said, the GG Allin quote at the end is worth the price of entry.

September 18, 2010 11:42 AM



Robert Barry Francos said...

Hey Walter,

Yes, you absolutely deserve to be mentioned among the record collectors. I was thinking of adding you when I started piece, and realized I had left you off this weekend (even woke me up in the middle of the night). You are among my favorite collectors, possibly because I had a hand in your "disease" (sorry, Sandra!).

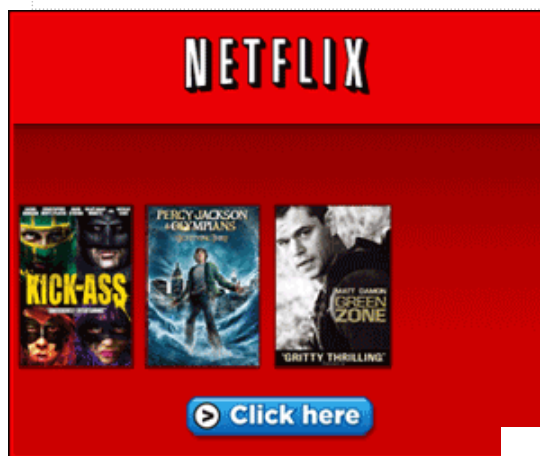
I put it all down to one moment many years ago when you were still in your teens, I believe, and you asked me if I had ever heard of this band called Love, and that you heard that their records were rare; at that point I reached behind me and pulled out 4 of their albums. Your jaw dropped. Or perhaps it was all those mixed tapes I made for you back then (and you've returned that favor, I must add).

And as for Gloria Balsam's fabulous "Fluffy," well, it could have been impLOG; shall I send you a copy, LOL? Sandra may end up begging for some of Balsam's masterpiece.

Big hugs and missing you both!

September 20, 2010 11:47 AM

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