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Above: Jane Birkin

TUESDAY, JULY 27, 2010

I can't go on, I'll go on

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Gaelan Connell in *Bandslam*

Movie poster art by Jack Davis



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- It's brand new on DVD, but *I Need That Record!: The Death (or Possible Survival) of the Independent Record Store* carries a 2008 copyright, and in those two years recession has crushed a lot of retail. The 71-minute film, an obvious labor of love for producer, director, cinematographer and editor Brendon Toller, has its roots in independent rock music, but actually is a bittersweet portrait of small business getting stomped by the corporate giant. Which is nothing new: Noam Chomsky offers Toller his recollection of the ouster of the neighborhood grocer in the 1930s as the first supermarket moved into town. But music isn't food, at least not in the literal sense, and music-buying has experienced a whirlwind evolution ever since CDs replaced vinyl and mp3s replaced CDs.

The independent record store of the title is (or was) the downtown hole in the wall operated by someone who channeled their passions and obsessions into a modest business. I remember the first one I ever set foot in, The Etc. Shop in Bellmore, New York, where I heard Iron Butterfly's "In-a-Gadda-Da-Vidda" and saw a poster of Frank Zappa on a toilet ("To Zappa Crappa") and became an instant fan of Paul Williams's *Crawdaddy* magazine when it was still a newspaper. That was back in the late 1960s and early '70s when these places were really head shops (hash pipes and bongs in the display cases, patchouli incense in the air), with a decent inventory of unusual record albums and many bootlegs.

Toller interviews store owners, several in the process of eviction, and musicians such as Thurston Moore and Lenny Kaye who were not only fans of independently produced rock music back when, but also somewhat dependent on these small businesses to sell their albums. One store owner makes a prediction that Walmart, then the nation's number-one seller of CDs, would scale back its inventory to

just a few titles as younger consumers simply download individual tracks online. Time has proven him right: it's getting difficult to buy *any* CDs outside of online retailers. The film is certainly worth a look, and the DVD bonus features include extended interviews with musicians, store owners and fans.

- *I Need That Record!* may pooh-pooh commercial pop, but the heart of rock and roll is beating like a big bass drum in *Bandslam* (2009), in which high schoolers form a rock group (called – without apology to Samuel Beckett – I Can't Go On, I'll Go On) to compete in the title event, a garage band duel. It was released last August, tanked at the box office and took almost a year to make it to DVD. What a crime! Directed by Todd Graff, who did the amateur-theatre-world film *Camp* in 2003, *Bandslam* is funny, energetic and the music infectious as high school geek Will 'Dewey' Burton (Gaelan Connell) juggles two potential girlfriends (former Disney stars Vanessa Hudgens and Aly Michalka), emails unanswered letters to David Bowie, and weathers separation anxiety from single mom Lisa Kudrow. Someone asked me if it's another *High School Musical*, but I don't know. I've never seen *High School Musical*. *Bandslam* is airy and exuberant, with characters that ring idealistic and situations grounded in fuzzy sitcom reality. Perfect summer fare, I got hooked and watched it three times in one week.
- The recent and long awaited CD release of the Rolling Stones' *Exile on Main Street* thrilled fans and undoubtedly puzzled anyone not into the band or too young to remember when the double album came out in 1971. Directed by Stephen Kijak, with Mick Jagger, Keith Richards and Charlie Watts serving as Executive Producers, the film *Stones in Exile* (2010) arrives on DVD, presumably to explain a time, place and product unique in Rolling Stones history. I placed an order for it several months in advance, my enthusiasm stoked by an announced running time of 145 minutes. How thorough I thought it would be! When the DVD arrived, the back cover lists its running time at 145 minutes, while in the opposite corner there's a rundown of bonus features made to appear independent of the main feature. When I played the documentary, however, it clocked in at a minute or two over an hour, and was nothing but a puff piece. "*Rip off!!!*" says I.

POSTED BY FLICKHEAD AT 7:15 PM

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