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I Need That Record! The Death (Or Possible Survival) Of The Independent Record Store

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By **Less Lee Moore**

I Need That Record! purports to be a “documentary feature examining why over 3,000 independent record stores have closed across the US in the past decade.” But it’s much more than that. In truth, the film does a splendid job of not only showing the causal links that led to this somewhat alarming situation, but also asking, answering, and ultimately, allowing its viewers to weigh in on what this really means.



To understand why indie record stores have been dying, writer and director Brendan Toller shows the chain

of connections, including the business practices of major record labels; Alan Freed's payola scandal in the 1960s; the rise of Clear Channel and CD costs; the proliferation of big box stores; and the advent of MP3 technology and the legal actions eventually taken by the RIAA against illegal downloading.

Although it's obvious where Toller's sympathies lie (the interviews are with record store business owners and indie/alternative musicians), the film never resorts to being preachy. It's unlikely that staunch advocates of the free market will be swayed, but those who have wobbled between choosing sides in this war of attrition may find enough compelling evidence to finally decide.

Toller's clever usage of retro footage from the '40s, '50s, and '60s strongly implies that The Powers That Be are a bunch of out-of-touch old white dudes with a mentality that hasn't changed with the changing times. The opening titles utilize a unique and appropriate animated montage of album art cut outs and drawings to evoke the idea that the old way of thinking needs to be destroyed and reimagined.

In addition, there are many excellent news clips from each of the various milestones discussed, such as interviews with the creators of MP3.com, the infamous debate between Public Enemy's Chuck D. and Metallica's Lars Ulrich from the Charlie Rose show, and even President George W. Bush taking us on a tour through his iPod.

However, this documentary isn't just about the death of record stores or even fighting the man and supporting the little guys, it's about the cultural changes in the Western world that have much more disturbing implications. Over and over we hear people talk about the death of community. Professor and political activist Noam Chomsky (who admits he hasn't listened to any music made since the 1940s) likens it to the change from local groceries to chain supermarkets.

Several others discuss how dealing with the Internet is lonely and boring; Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore amusingly speculates that this is why there seems to be so much Black Metal music in the last few years. But not everyone wants to hold hands and sing Kumbaya. Punk author Legs McNeil seems positively horrified by the idea of too much togetherness: "Who wants to meet 'em face to face? Jesus Christ!"

This tension between being unique and being part of a group poses an interesting question. How do we resolve the conflict between sticking it to the suits at the major labels and the RIAA and still wanting to maintain a sense of community, even if it's our own definition of community?

Chris Ashworth of United Record Press, the largest vinyl manufacturer in the US, provides some words of wisdom and hope. Starting off with a technical description of how analog (vinyl) can capture 100% of a sound wave, while digital (CD, MP3) is physically incapable of doing so, he explains that now we have all the quantity and portability of MP3s in addition to the quality of analog.

Thus, we have the freedom of choice, something that the major labels and radio were not giving us before. Ultimately, it's all about the music, and the song playing during the closing credits—The Kinks' "I'm Not Like Everybody Else"—provides a thought-provoking and fitting coda to this remarkable film.

I Need That Record! screened at more than 15 film festivals in 2009. It was released on DVD on April 17, exclusively available through retailers participating in [Record Store Day 2010](#).

The DVD, distributed by [MVD Visual](#) and [Think Indie Physical Goods](#), will be available everywhere on July 27, and features more than two hours of extra interviews with Thurston Moore, Legs McNeil, and many others shown in the film. You can also pre-order it from [See Of Sound](#).

To watch clips from the film and find out more, visit the ***I Need That Record*** [website](#).



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