

I NEED THAT RECORD! The Death (Or Possible Survival) of the Independent Record Store (MVD)

A title like *I Need That Record! The Death (Or Possible Survival) of the Independent Record Store* practically invites suck-up articles from fanzines, blogs and everyone else enamored with the Old Way of Doing Things. But in the midst of those inevitable accolades from fans who scour store racks, one wonders if constructive criticism got lost along the way. While this documentary is certainly worth seeing, it overlooks a few factors in the decline of record stores and, more importantly, one very key point: The best part about a good record store is the music found in it, *not* the record store itself.

Had filmmaker Brendan Toller been advised of this point, we probably wouldn't have been subjected to a rather dry 10-minute opening sequence outlining the last days of two doomed Connecticut record emporiums, Record Express and Trash Ameri-



can Style. Record Express has apparently found the market isn't there anymore (details are scant as to why it's closing), while Trash American Style has been forced out by a cutthroat printing chain that usurped its lease. Unfortunate, but the stories behind each are about as interesting as the closure of a laundromat, and the inarticulate musings of various customers only make it drag that much more.

From there, *I Need That Record* runs down all the factors in the death of music retail: big box competition, downloading, failure to adapt to market trends and the familiar tale of the music industry's declining fortunes, greed, and failure to develop meaningful new artists. While obvious to the more sophisticated music fan, it's useful for younger viewers and the uninitiated—hence important in that regard.

The argument is laid out amidst the inevitable stock footage of old cartoons and ancient black and white films, plus interviews with various musicians, writers and record store owners—which are hit and miss. Occasionally, insights are offered, such as when Lenny Kaye reminisces about working at Village Oldies or Ian MacKaye of Dischord Records contrasts his bands and imprint from the majors. But just as often, the interviews are unengaging anecdotes about record stores, the thrill of holding vinyl in one's hands, the pain of finding a job after one's record store tanks or hackneyed rants about the music industry (Did you know it's corrupt and profit driven? Shocking!)—which affect the pacing of the documentary.

Likewise, the critiques of major labels hint at but don't quite directly state the real problem with the music industry (and not just manufactured pop acts): With very few exceptions, major label music—often the bread and butter of the music retailer—has sucked since the early '80s. Sure downloading and competition from other forms of entertainment have affected sales. But if major label music had the excitement and creativity of, say, modern video games, it wouldn't be suffering at the cash register. As they overanalyze market trends, majors seem to forget that if you put out crappy product, you get crappy sales—which in turn impacts retail establishments. Is it a coincidence that the music industry had consistently vibrant growth in the '60s and '70s, when it still had contemporary artists with something to say?

Beyond that, there's the curious failure to acknowledge that even during those boom years, the closure of record stores wasn't all that uncommon. Granted, it's undoubtedly more pronounced now, but is there any correlation? The film never attempts to answer that question, nor does it fully explore the reason many stores then and now closed: Owners' lack of business acumen. *I Need That Record* touches on but also doesn't adequately cover the flipside: Why other stores have stayed open, the vinyl renaissance and the possible role of the Internet in both.

All of that said, Toller is due some credit for making a film that probably no one else would have made and for attempting to address a question that many want to answer: Why have more than 3,000 independent record stores closed over the past 10 years? It could very well be an open-ended query with no simple explanation. **(Doug Sheppard)**