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## Record Store Day Q&A With Graham Jones of 'Last Shop Standing'

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By Phil Gallo | April 18, 2013 10:02 AM EDT

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Record Store Day has made “Last Shop Standing” -- a new documentary on U.K. record shops – the official film of this year’s edition of its annual event. “Last Shop Standing,” released in the U.K. last year and coming out April 20 on DVD, has been screened in the days leading up to Record Store Day and will be screened around the world on the day itself, April 20th.

It’s being shown in China, Italy, Australia and, of course, throughout the U.S. and the U.K., where director Pip Piper and author Graham Jones will participate in Q&As at places such as the British Music Experience museum – between visits to record shops, naturally.

“We gave a free license to all the stores in the world,” says Jones, whose 2009 book of the same title was the basis of Piper’s film, wherein the author plays the role of

onscreen historian. “I think we’ve got about 85 stores who have organized their own screenings.”

Lou’s Records has it booked as part of Friday Night Frenzy in Encinitas, Calif., on April 19. Santa Cruz, Calif.’s Streetlight Records is screening it drive-in style behind their store. Hideaway Records has a noon screening in Philadelphia on the 20th and Tampa, Fla.’s Uncle Sam’s Music has a morning and an afternoon screening.

In 2012 Piper and Jones visited 20 record stores throughout the U.K. -- Jones' book covered 50 – to chronicle both their history and current atmospheres. They financed the film's 39,000-pound budget entirely through crowd-sourcing, with bands donating their music for the soundtrack, which includes an end credits song, the James Clarke 5’s “Sexbomb Uber Alles,” that has drawn considerable interest.

The marquee names in the film are all musicians -- Johnny Marr, Paul Weller, Billy Bragg, etc. – but Jones and Piper had strict rules to follow in determining who would be part of the film: “The musicians were chosen because they had spoken up in the media about the importance of independent record stores. We only wanted to use people who came from the same position as us. We actually had a famous person get in touch of us to say he was willing to talk. [Piper] said ‘I can’t find anything on the Internet where he has ever said a single word of praise for independent record stores.’ So we actually turned him down. Quite funny.”

Jones, a Liverpudlian who lives in Hook, Hampshire, about an hour outside London, has worked in music distribution for more than 25 years. The last 10 have been spent at Proper Music, a label and distributor he co-founded that has a roster dominated by singer-songwriters such as Richard Thompson, Nick Cave, Bonnie Raitt and the Pet Shop Boys.

The idea for Jones' book came after one of his aunts asked him if record shops were going the way of candlestick makers. “I wasn’t sure what she meant, so she explained that when she was young everywhere on the High Street there would be candlestick makers and coin shops and stamp shops,” Jones says. “That inspired me to write the book. At that point I thought they were all going to close. I traveled the country and visited 50 record stores and the mood was downbeat. Everybody thought it was an uncertain future and [that] the record companies weren’t looking after them.”

In the end, however, Jones says “the book became a celebration of record stores because they all had funny tales... it didn’t turn out to be the book I originally thought I was writing.”

Jones and myself share a bond, both of us having documented record stores. He's tackled the U.K. with “Last Shop Standing,” and with “Record Store Days,” published in 2010, Gary Calamar and I covered the U.S. In our discussion, Jones discussed the difference between the narrative of 2009 and three years later when

they were working on the film, the effect of supermarkets on the U.K. music business and a new band he is a fan of -- because of a conversation in a record store.

**Certainly in the U.S. the mood in record stores last year was significantly different than it was three or four years earlier. Did you observe a similar mood swing in the U.K. when you went out to do the film?**

I'm confident that in 20 years time we'll still have record shops -- but I [originally] wrote the book because I thought that, in 20 years, there might not be any. The mood has completely changed. When I wrote the book it was the lowest point in the U.K. -- we only had 269 record stores left. Doing the film was great because independent record store [owners] have confidence now and feel they are the future. They feel that the public cares and the media cares. Before Record Store Day came along, the only thing in the media was about another record store or record chain closing. When I did the book, most stores had a reasonable amount of space devoted to vinyl, but on the second visit it was quite noticeable how much more space was taken up by vinyl records. You're never going to see supermarkets rack vinyl next to the baked beans.

**The film points to supermarkets as a major cause for the initial downfall of record stores, which is a factor that does not exist in the U.S. Could you explain that?**

Independent stores were important to record companies because they compiled the charts. Record companies looked after them. When the biggest supermarket got involved in stocking the chart CDs in the late '80s, all the other supermarkets joined [in], so the record companies put all of their promotional budgets and discounting into the supermarkets. From the U.K. point of view, unless a record shop diversified and moved away from stocking chart product, they were doomed. No way they could match the supermarkets for price. What's quite interesting is that so many record shops now don't even stock the top 30. The chart doesn't mean anything to them anymore.

**The collapse, though, wasn't felt until the 21st century?**

Between 2004 and 2009 we lost 540 independent shops and all the chains, except one. It's interesting looking at the map of record stores now. Most of them own their own building, none of them are on the High Street -- they're all on the cheaper end of town and in small towns where there is not competition.

**Telling the story on film rather than in a book is, obviously, a very different narrative approach. What element of the book did you want to see play out on the screen?**

It was really important to us was that the record shop owners were not overshadowed by the musicians in the film. We tried to tell the story through the eyes of the people who had been there and that's why we didn't just [put] cutting edge shops in. The guy who sold 500 copies of Bill Halley' "Rock Around the Clock" the week it came out, the owner of the store where the Beatles used to shop -- we wanted to cover the history of the shops as well.

**How did you approach financing?**

The reason the film is 54 minutes [long] is that was all the money we could raise. As money was coming in we were going out on the road -- four of us traveling the country in a car, the crew sleeping on the floors of my relatives' houses. It was a rock and roll lifestyle, with people older than the average band. As more money came in, we were able to do more filming. We interviewed Richard Hawley in a record store in Sheffield and afterward we went down to a pub, and the landlord got chatting and said they'd let us put on a benefit concert. That was staggering. It was a heartwarming evening, to see all these musicians who had given up their time to raise money for the film.

**How much shopping did you do while filming?**

I'm proud to say that, at every record store we visited, we bought [something]. We did our best to support the stores and spent over 600 pounds between us. How can you not buy something? When they would stop filming, I'd be looking through all the stuff. What was funny is that half these people are my customers, so I'm still selling to them while they were putting all the stuff away. I was still doing my day job.

**Any great finds on the journey?**

[It's] not so much a great find, though the director was thrilled about finding a mint copy of *Woodstock* on vinyl, but something I'd heard. A person we interviewed, Sid Griffin (of the Long Ryders and Coal Porters) -- [who] we couldn't put in the main body of the film because he spoke about visiting record shops in America -- said to me there's a band I got the other week, they're called the Dreaming Spires. They had an album called 'Brothers in Brooklyn' and I found it in the next record shop (we visited). I thought it was absolutely brilliant. I dropped them an email and they said why don't you do a screening and we'll play. So one of my favorite nights was in Oxford where the Dreaming Spires played and I thought: 'Wow, isn't it funny how things can turn out just from a snippet of conversation.' I thought the whole thing was really nice because it was an independent band helping an independent film helping independent record stores.

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