

Last Shop Standing ★★★1/2

(2012) 124 min. DVD: \$19.95. Music Video
Distributors (avail. from most distributors).

Inspired by Graham Jones's titular book, and told in three acts (the subtitle—"The Rise, Fall and Rebirth of the Independent Record Store"—says it all), Pip Piper's documentary is a love letter to the music lover's cathedral: the record store. A small group of longstanding U.K. outlets are profiled here, whose owners often share fascinating stories. One recalls her mother's initial reaction to Elvis's "Heartbreak Hotel" ("that will never sell"), while others remember the surprise of scruffy local youths like the Beatles and Rolling Stones rising from punk kids to international superstars. The decline of vinyl is explored (a plot, the owners say, of the record companies to undermine the quality of records, using substandard materials and manufacturing processes to promote sales of the then-new compact disc), as are the scandalous tactics employed by jobbers to juice sales when Nielsen's "SoundScan" (a new way of centrally tracking and reporting sales in shops) came on the scene. Of course, vinyl has actually turned out to be a hardy medium (I'm writing this review sitting in a hotel in Dayton, OH, where not just one but two mom and pop music stores feature vinyl, including new releases). Vinyl is no longer the dominant consumer medium, but it's also never quite gone away. DVD extras include extended interviews with musicians and record shop lovers, including Johnny Marr, Paul Weller, Billy Bragg, and others. Highly recommended. Aud: P. (C. Block)