

By Mike Bell, Calgary Herald April 20, 2013

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Writing about music is like dancing about architecture.

That was said by someone who was talking about writing about music (which would be exactly like interpretive dancing to architecture, something, if I remember correctly an interview from a couple of years back, Canadian Margie Gillis was given government funding for).

But what about writing about celebrating music? Is that like, say, ballroom dancing about spackling? Or more like soliloquying to tax filing? Leathercrafting for drain cleaning? There are a couple of reasons this question arises on this particular weekend, on a global level and on a more national and local front.

In the bigger picture (one that was painted about investment banking), Saturday is Record Store Day, an annual international celebration of the small, independent record stores, once thought to be heading to the realm of paleontology (perfect to accompany doing The Dougie) but thankfully making something of a comeback.

A superb chronicling of that can be found in the documentary Last Shop Standing: The Rise, Fall and Rebirth of the Independent Record Shop, which is being released on DVD to coincide with Record Store Day, and features store owners, former owners, DJs, writers (huh?) and musicians such as Johnny (freaking) Marr and Paul Weller about the state of bricks and mortar shops, with the focus on the U.K.

At home, in Calgary, the shops, once on the way out - see the late, lamented Megatunes - have now also bounced back and are, for the most case, thriving, with a handful of spectacular specialty stores to discover music in its most tactile form. (And that's not even including other places that stock CDs or vinyl, including Luke's Drug Mart in Bridgeland that has become something of a hotbed for LPs.)

Five of them will be helping to celebrate the day, with their usual sales, special limited edition Record Day releases up for grabs and other in-store specials: Sloth Records (736B 17th Ave. S.W.); The Inner Sleeve (117 3411 20th St. S.W.); Heritage Posters and Music (1502 11th Ave. S.W.); Hot Wax (114 10th St. N.W.); and Melodiya Records (2523 17th Ave. S.W.).

These are the music stores: support them. Support them because these are the people who support music.

But more importantly, these are the people who support those who actually make it their life's work and passion to open worlds and minds by making that music.

And a talented great many of whom are doing so in your own city, with many of those aforementioned stores being a direct pipeline to what they produce and what they hope to share with the rest of the world.

Which brings us to the second cause for celebrating music this weekend, which is the Juno Awards that are taking place in Regina. Granted, awarding music is like, hmm, we're going to go with marlin fishing about personal theologies (oddly, also the name of a TV series starring John Lurie, I think) and it's more of a celebration of the industry than the actual art and those who create it.

But. Only if you choose to view it that way.

And it's easy. If you want to see it as the crass feting of the machinations behind the commodifying, promotion and manipulation of the people who make that music, then, sure, it's that. Hell, you could even look at Record Store Day - now with major label support and even a beer sponsor - as that, if you so choose.

However, peel that away, discard it in the cynicism bin, and there is also an element - deep, deep inside - of the Junos that really is about celebrating the music that is being made inside of this country and even inside of this city.

Two Calgary acts are among those being celebrated this year, including young classical piano star Jan Lisiecki and reggae-pop band Makeshift Innocence - both of whom are enjoying their first well-deserved Juno nods.

You could complain that a paltry pair of nominations is something of a slap in the face for a city which could have, should have, netted far more. Or you could celebrate that two of our own are being, well, celebrated: these musicians and their music.

It's something that should happen every day, but there's a special focus on it this weekend, so follow suit.

Hit one of those record stores, head out to one of the city's many clubs or concert venues, stay in and put on your favourite albums, or, fine, even watch the Juno Awards on Sunday night.

However you do it, whatever means you choose, take the time to celebrate music.

It's the one thing you can actually dance to.

Record Store Day takes place Saturday at participating independent music stores around the city. The Junos take place this weekend in Regina.

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