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DVD Review: Last Shop Standing



Here's a fun little film. While it has no narrator, *Last Shop Standing* most certainly has a narrative. Stringing together interviews of record shop owners from around the UK, the film charts “the rise, fall and rebirth of the independent record shop” (that's the film's subtitle, too). Largely avoiding shops in London, *Last Shop Standing* instead draws from such (relatively) far-flung locales as Cardiff, Swansea and Glasgow.

While the perspective of each shop owner – almost always presented speaking from behind his or her retail counter – differs, the common threads are woven together to tell the story. The free-wheeling days when record companies were awash in money were followed by the forced ending of vinyl. There's general agreement among these shop owners that this was a major miscalculation on the part of the industry. The manner in which the labels allowed “supermarkets” (the UK term for what we in America call department or big-box stores) to undercut indie shops was, in the minds of these interviewees, another nail in the coffin. They point to the expertise that the man (or woman) behind the counter in the indie shop has, and compare that to the general cluelessness of a chain-store employee who's also selling toasters and wheelbarrows. As **Richard Hawley** (one of several musicians who appears in the film along with **Paul Weller**, **Billy Bragg** and **Johnny Marr**) says, “You are never going to

discover [Captain Beefheart](#) or the [13th Floor Elevators](#) or the [Velvet Underground](#) in your local supermarket, ever.”

And that point leads to the film’s third part, the rebirth of the indie store. The popularity of vinyl as an artifact is an important factor, and the [Record Store Day](#) phenomenon has given indie shops an enormous boost, especially with over 400 limited releases (in 2012) available only at indie shops, and only on vinyl. So for record enthusiasts, *Last Shop Standing* paints a much more optimistic picture of the future than you might otherwise expect. True, many shops didn’t make it to this modern promised land: in fact a hundred-year-old shop is seen closing. But through industriousness, tenacity, a love of music and a willingness to adapt and stay attuned to the needs of their market, indie shops are thriving. Yes, as *Last Shop Standing* tells us, in the 1980s there were more than 2200 independent record shop in the UK, and today there are less than three hundred. But judging by the people in this film, there’s every reason to think that many of these will remain for years to come.

The film itself clocks in at under an hour, but the DVD includes 74 minutes of extras, including longer interviews with several of the principals, including author **Graham Jones**, the man who wrote the book that gives the film its name.

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Tags: [lastshop standing](#), [record store day](#)

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