



Share |

STRANGE THINGS ARE HAPPENING

LAST SHOP STANDING

DVD. Convexe.

BRICK AND MORTAR AND LOVE

DVD. MVD.

Home
Latest Additions
News

Reviews:
DVD reviews
Book reviews
Music reviews
Culture reviews

Features & Interviews

Galleries:
Cult Films & TV
Books & Comics
Cult Icons
Burlesque
Ephemera & Toys

Video

Hate Mail

The Strange Things
Boutique

FAQ
Links
Contact



165

Like



There's something about record stores that transcend mere commerce, as the recent shock at the near demise of HMV showed. The idea of our last major high street music retailer was met with a sense of despair by many for whom a record store was more than just a place where you buy records – it was a place where you found your identity, where your dreams came true. No matter that giant, ruthless chains like HMV had effectively crushed the indie record shop scene long before iTunes and illegal downloads came along to deliver the killing blow.

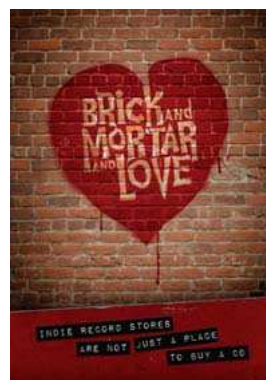
And yet, while HMV teetered on the brink, small stores remain, and this curiosity of record stores in what we are continually told is a digital age (no matter than most music sales remain physical) has attracted several filmmakers over the last two years. Jeanie Finlay paved the way a couple of years ago with **Sound It Out**, an excellent feel-good documentary about the Teeside shop of that name, and now comes two more, looking at the state of the business in the UK and the USA, with very different styles.

Last Shop Standing is the closest to Finlay's film, taking the idea of the small, indie record store stubbornly clinging to life against all the odds and extrapolating it across the UK. Based on the book by Graham Jones, how also interviews the store owners here, it's a film that seems to reflect the shops it is covering – rather ramshackle, rough around the edges but with genuine personality. Mixing interviews with shop owners across the UK and artists like Clint Boon, Johnny Marr, Richard Hawley and Billy Bragg, this is very much a celebration of the eccentricities of the record shop, and of vinyl. While these shops all sell CDs, it's clear that for both the owners and the customers, the vinyl is what really matters (and what offers a unique product that can't be downloaded or bought in supermarkets). As someone puts it early on, you might love the music on a CD, but you'll never love the CD itself – but vinyl records have always had that emotional connection to them, from the look, feel and smell to the ritualistic aspect of taking a record out of the sleeve, giving it a quick wipe, placing it on the turntable and dropping the needle on the groove. If that doesn't turn you on just a little, then you probably don't like music very much.

The film follows the highs and lows of the indie record shop, but ends on a positive note – the idea that while the mass appeal days may be over, there will always be room for the niche store where you can pick up a copy of **The Wit and Wisdom of Ronald Reagan** (two sides of blank vinyl, novelty fans!). At 50 minutes, it doesn't overstay its welcome, and the disc has 74 minutes of extras (extended interviews, including Sid Griffin who didn't make the final cut of the film proper) to pad the package out.

Brick and Mortar and Love tells a rather less cheerful story, as it follows the fortunes of Louisville, Kentucky record store ear X-tacy as it struggles to survive against a falling customer base in its 25th year of operation. It's a more ambiguous tale, less perhaps about the obsessive love of music than the struggles of independent businesses to adapt and survive, with store owner John Timmons coming across as both idealistic and manipulative.

My first reaction on watching the film was to think that ear X-tacy (just a horrible name for a shop, by the way) was *huge* – at 10,000 square feet, it certain seems bigger than my local HMV and Fopp, and is a far cry from the cramped, stuffed shops of **Last Shop Standing**. It doesn't feel very indie, and of course is way too big to survive, and so – after first saying that the current location is where the store will remain forever, Timmons moves it to a smaller store. But the ongoing financial struggles see him first hold a press conference saying that the shop might have to close, and then later – after public support and the location move seems to have provided some stability – to post *another* appeal that comes uncomfortably close to guilt-tripping and emotional blackmail on Facebook. This second appeal seems a step too far for some people, and I have to admit I could see their point. It's followed by a fund-raising gig (one artist is forced to ponder the idea of playing a fund-raiser for a For Profit commercial business) but it becomes clear that nothing will save the store.



Brick and Mortar and Love certainly doesn't shy away from criticism of Timmons (interviewing a couple of vocal detractors), but as the title suggests, this isn't a hatchet job. For all his mistakes, Timmons seems genuinely in love with the idea of the record store and music in general, promoting local bands alongside big names (the store played host to gigs by Foo Fighters, My Morning Jacket and others), and the store certainly seems to have been a hub for local music fans. Big shops are not necessarily bad things – at least they never used to be (hell, I recall when you could make a tape of your own appalling racket, photocopy a sleeve and have Virgin in Manchester sell the damn thing for you – imagine that happening in a giant chain now?) - and there's no question that a world without ear X-tacy is a less interesting world.

The message behind both of these fascinating and entertaining documentaries is simple – if you love music, support your local indie record shop before they are taken away from you. As this review is posted on Record Store Day, I'd suggest now is as good a time as any to start. Go buy an LP and give the MP3s a rest for a while*.

DAVID FLINT

[BUY BRICK AND MORTAR AND LOVE \(USA\)](#)

[BUY LAST SHOP STANDING \(USA\)](#)