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VINYL SPARKS INDIE STORE RECOVERY

18 APR 2013 BY KETH SHARP FILED UNDER: FEATURED, VIDEO

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Are independent record stores dying out?

This is the question posed to 27 British independent record store owners in "Last Shop Standing" a 50-minute documentary which charts the rise, fall and potential rebirth of the independent record shop.

Set to be released in Canada on April 20th, independent record day, this is a special day that has been designated to stimulate interest in supporting independent record sales with special releases only available in independent record stores.

Warner Music Canada has entered into the spirit of things and have released 48 special titles that are only available in independent record stores.

This British documentary interviews the owners of 27 indie record stores scattered throughout Great Britain. They tell of how the release of 78 rpm vinyl records in the late 1950's triggered interest in releases from the likes of Elvis Presley and Bill Haley. How the 45 rpm single became the release of choice in the 60's, with stores selling box loads of Beatles, Rolling Stones and The Who singles.

They tell of how record companies used to ply them with free product in order to stimulate the record charts, which then stimulated radio airplay. The advent of the LP vinyl in the 70's where albums could sell on the virtue of their jacket artwork, the punk boom of the early 80's where indie labels sprouted like weeds, focusing on the indie record stores as their prime retail outlet.

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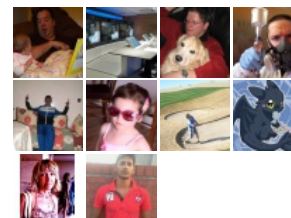
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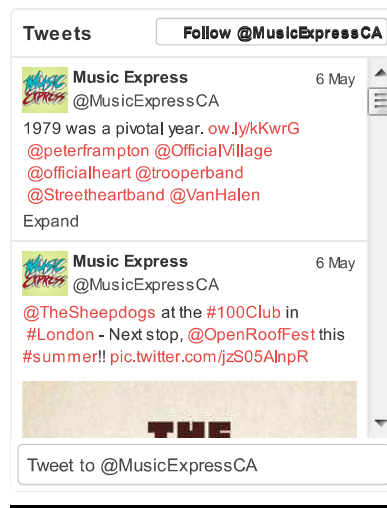
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Also utilizing interviews with the likes of Paul Weller, Johnny Marr, Billy Bragg and Norman Cook, these artists talk about the community atmosphere of the local record shop whose staff was knowledgeable about all the latest releases and about the kindred spirit of people just hanging around stores, listening to new releases in sound booths and chatting amongst themselves about new releases and hot new bands.

It is agreed amongst the 27 store owners that the decline of the indie record store was sparked by the introduction of the compact disc and the immediate phasing out of vinyl. As one store owner noted "Yes, a CD was more portable and easier to display but a vinyl album was something that you treasured. The album jacket design, the more ceremony of taking it out of its sleeve, placing it on your turntable and having your dad yell from upstairs to 'turn that racket down'.

With the advent of CD's came the intrusion of supermarkets competing against the indie stores and selling product at deep discounts. "Some stores tried to match the stores and got killed, we simply couldn't compete against them," noted one store owner.

"It was death by a 1,000 cuts," bemoaned one store manager. "Record companies, who had used us shamelessly to promote their sales and establish radio airplay, were now totally ignoring us. Their focus was on supermarkets and chain stores. It was almost like they didn't want us to exist."

Then along came Napster and suddenly customers realized they could download their music for free. "Almost overnight, the deejays stopped coming into our stores, it's safe to say the record companies never saw digital downloads coming. There was no prototype for them to learn by their mistakes."

From 2,200 record stores in Britain in 2002, that number shrank to 269 by 2010 and it looked as though indie record stores in Britain were a dying breed. But then, something remarkable happened.

A small resurgence in vinyl started to bring music collectors back into the stores, stores themselves became more focused and specialized, and supermarkets lost interest in selling all but the top selling titles.

Customers still feel that music should be freely accessible but there is a growing hardcore who are channeling back into the stores as record labels have again become more focused on stimulating traffic into the stores. Vinyl releases are up by 40%, indie labels and artists are reverting back to focusing on vinyl and the annual Record Company-inspired Record Day event – with their unique, special offers are doing their bit to revive a dying industry. To quote Monty Python, "Not Dead Yet"



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