

FFanzeen: Rock'n'Roll Attitude With Integrity

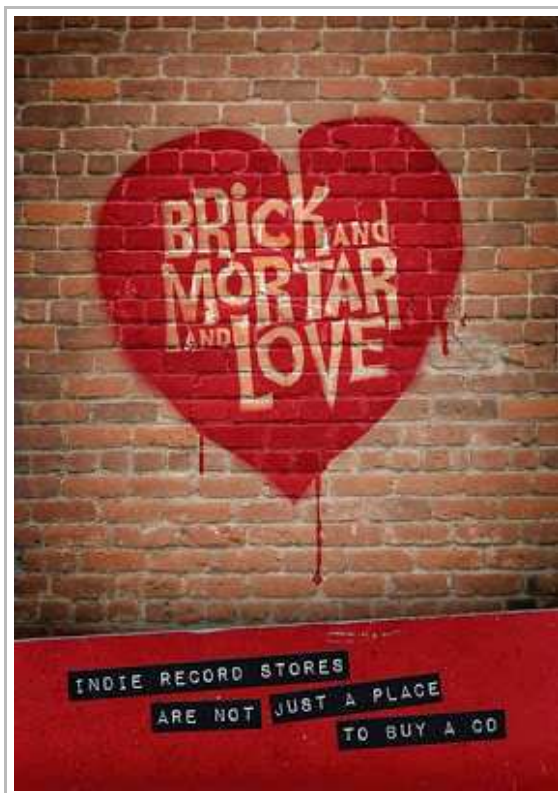
Through the writings and photography of Robert Barry Francos, a view of the arts and culture, including everyday life.

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DVD Reviews: Brick and Mortar and Love; Last Shop Standing

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Images from the Internet

It is wonderful that independent record stores are getting more notice, especially with the fall of the majors, like Tower Records and Virgin Records. All we who love to browse through the record stores have our touchstone places where we gather(ed) and have the kinship of our passion. For me, there were a few, such as Sounds (St. Mark's Place, NYC), the House of Guitars (Irondequoit, NY, a suburb of Rochester, especially during the Greg Prevost/Andy Bauilbk years), and Home of the Hits, aka Play It Again Sam, in Buffalo, NY; RIP). I used to joke that I couldn't go to those stores because I couldn't leave. But, of course, I went. These two documentaries are hardly the first on record stores and collecting, such as I Need That Record! [reviewed [HERE](#)], but are important nonetheless.



Brick and Mortar and Love
Directed by Scott Shuffitt
Trust Gang Films

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About Me

Robert Barry Francos
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70 minutes, 2012

www.Brickandmortarandlove.com

www.MVDvisual.com

Everything closes eventually. Max's Kansas City, CBGB, nearly everything on St. Mark's Place, the local video store (remember when they were everywhere?), and numerous record shops. Why? Some blame the ease of scoring free music online. Many people under 25 never owned a physical piece of music in their lives. But there is a connection to a record store that once experienced, can become a feeling you always want to recreate.

Such a place is the focus on this documentary, which is followed from 2010 through 2011. Located in Louisville, KY, ear X-stacy was such a gathering place. Run by John Timmons and a devoted staff, the store went through numerous permutations, such as having a second, unsuccessful location changing by moving the main store's site more than once.

We follow the store's progress – or, to be more accurate, its possible death thrashes – as they struggle to keep the doors open. These events are handled well, keeping the viewers' suspense going, almost as if it were alive. This is almost as much a thriller as a documentary. We follow the bands that play in-store shows, both local and nationally-touring musicians that play there (such as My Morning Jacket), the management, the workers, and the buyers.

But this one store is not the entire scope of the film. They also cover various other stores in the mid-west that are struggling, talking to the owners who both praise ear X-stacy and shudder in their own boots. There's also talking heads of some musicians, but none of it feels static.

This film is, on one hand, quite nostalgic about the store, showing it in a loving light most of the time, but they also show some who are quite calloused about the store's trouble, owing it up to bad management rather than the market. Considering that some of the majors have had to close over time, such as Tower, shows that the fact that some of these stores have managed to scrimp by actually shows just the opposite of that claim, in my opinion. There are also always going to be naysayers.

I also understand. When CBGB shuttered, it felt like a sentimental blow, but I also know that the CBGB I knew is not the same CBGB that closed. They had become a brand, a change something that turned us Blank Generation-ers off, considering branding is something we mostly abhorred (I remember going to shows in the 2000s and being shocked at the punks there dancing to rap and wearing Nike crap). The point is, after a store is open 25 years, is it the same store as when it opened? The impression they give here, is that ear X-stacy was pretty close to its initial model, which could be either for the better good, or as one musician claims, the worse.

Shuffitt manages to keep the story moving and fluid, manages to hold off much of the sentimental mawkishness that is present in many of these an-institution-is-in-trouble-folks docs. Some of the people running the place touch the heart, and I would have liked a follow-up on a few, but that's just me, Mr. Sentimentality.

to publish a print version of a music magazine in New York called FFanzeen, which dealt with the wide-ranging independent music scene. I also photographed many bands from the period (and since). Now I write this blog, and have a column at [jerseybeat\(dot\)com](http://jerseybeat(dot)com) (slash) [quietcorner\(dot\)html](http://quietcorner(dot)html). And the beat goes on.

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[Who Really Cares blog of Craig Davison](#)



Last Shop Standing: The Rise, Fall and Rebirth of the Independent Record Shop (Deluxe Edition)

Directed by Pip Piper

Convexe Entertainment

124 minutes, 2012 / 2012

www.Lastshopstanding.com

www.MVDvisual.com

Across the Pond, the UK equivalents of record stores are also having difficulties, to some extent, keeping up with the digi-world. Part of what is brought up here is the question of whether there is a conspiracy against them.

Based on the book by Graham Jones with the same name, Graham also hosts this documentary, as we are shown the back end of a number of record shops across Britain. Apparently what has been hard for the North American indie (and majors, for that matter) shop(pe) is reflected there. The one owned by Jones may not actually be the literal *last* one, but as the film states, many across the country are closing their doors for business, and few new ones are replacing them. For this exercise, 27 music sale palaces are presented, including Rough Trade.

This tale is broken into three segments, with the first being "Act 1: The Rise." As many of these stores have been opened for many generations (one over a century), and most of the owners shown are at least in their 60s if not 70s, they know what they are talking about as they discuss the decades.

Apparently, the record boom was started by Americans stationed over in Jolly Ole' in the mid-1950s, as requests for Elvis and the like started to flood in. Rock'n'roll in 78 form foreshadowed the first big wave of record purchasing. It wasn't stated here, but historically, before rock'n'roll, the big seller in these types of stores was sheet music

rather than the sounds themselves.

The next big wave came with the Beatles (we see some archival footage, ironically from when the boys landed at JFK in NYC) and what we called the British Invasion; not sure what they called it there, come to think of it). That was followed by the punk movement and the flood of independent records. Apparently, the period up to the mid-to-late 1980s was a great time to be selling vinyl.

This period, however, led to "Act 2: The Fall." Even though CDs were still sold in stores, there was, according to the film (and I agree) a complicit conspiracy by the major labels to get rid of vinyl. The example they use is that the larger record companies made it harder to get LPs, and also made them thinner and less trustworthy (true) so they would skip easier, driving people into buying what they were told was a more reliable CD product (lies; early CDs tended to skip quite regularly at the beginning). In addition, and this is from me rather than this film, you had a choice between a record or a CD that generally had three or four more songs. Guess which one sold more?

CDs, being a digital medium, of course led way to digi-music, where the listener to buy it directly from the company or musician, bypassing the store altogether (though not any cheaper). On a side note, again not stated in the film, is that before the early '60s, singles (i.e., 45s) were the biggest sellers. With the advent of the Beatles, albums became the most popular. With digit-music, the song rather than the collection became the top seller again.

Many stores had to develop a different model during the technological seismic phase. There were a large number that didn't make it, but there were some who managed to hold on. As Marshall McLuhan states correctly, when a technology becomes obsolete, it comes back as art. This has been true of vinyl, leading to "Act 3: The Rebirth." Stores also started to change their dynamics to include a wider variety of styles, adding extras like musical instruments and gear, and even having bands play at in-store shows.

The documentary has a wary tone about the future, and rightfully so. Who knows what will come around in the coming years. Who knew that Napster was the beginning of the happy days of music selling, as one store owner states here.

There are a lot of amazing good and intelligent musicians interviewed for this, such as Billy Bragg, Paul Weller, and Jo Good, to name a few. By giving a cross-section of stores over a wide area, we are given an overview of the condition the record store condition is in, as it were. On the other hand, as there is no central store at the heart of the story, it's hard to garner much emotional attachment for any of them. Sure, as collectors, we (I am assuming and speaking for everyone, I know) care about our stores, the personalities of the people who run them (such as the Yankees-hating owner of Revolutionary Records on St. Mark's Place; I would love to see a steel cage match with Yankees-loving Handsome Dick Manitoba... but I digress...)

Lots of cool extras on board, such as the trailer, a bit that plays catch-up with some of the stores after the film's release, and lots of extended interviews that go on for quite a while. In fact, the added interviews (including with Weller) together last longer than the film itself, which is a good deal!