

FROM VINYL TO DIGITAL AND BACK AGAIN

Record Store Days

GARY CALAMAR AND PHIL GALLO

FOREWORD BY PETER BUCK OF R.E.M.



Three Fascinating Boutiques

The 1990s saw the opening of three significant boutiques whose inventories would come to define various sub-movements in music. Through careful curation, impressive press clippings, solid Internet presence and mail order, and personal relationships with dozens of labels and musicians, the three stores outlasted Virgin, Tower, and local chains. They did so against heavy odds, Tower's Solomon pointed out: "Retail storefronts paid unrelenting high rents that rose every year through the 1980s and '90s."

Dusty Groove opened a weekends-only physical location in Chicago in 1997 after a year of operating as a Web-only retailer specializing in jazz, R&B, foreign soundtracks, and music



New York's Other Music has become a crucial outlet for independently released music.

from Brazil, France, and Africa. Downtown Music Gallery opened in lower Manhattan in 1991, dedicating itself to the avant-garde, whether jazz, folk, rock, or classical. And in the East Village, Other Music became New York City's store of choice for various scenes after the three music buyers at Kim's Underground opened their own place in December 1995.

"People love to come in to get something they haven't heard before," said Other Music co-owner Chris Vanderloo. "It's amazing how open people are in New York with their ears and their wallets. They're totally into new stuff."

"It's interesting to watch people from labels pick up imports and obscure stuff, and a year later you see all of it on domestic reissues. Beck would buy tons of stuff and then you could hear [those influences] in his next record."

Musicians helped attract business to Dusty Groove as the store was a key supplier of CDs and used vinyl when Brazil's Tropicalia movement was revived by the likes of Beck, David Byrne, Saint Etienne, and Stereolab.

"Tropicalia was very good to us," said Dusty Groove's head buyer and co-owner Rick Wojcik. "We were selling bossa nova and because the indie rock press like *Spin* would say this is hip, we'd do well. Blue Note Records and soul-funk were doing



Chicago's Dusty Groove specializes in jazz, R&B, soundtracks, and music from Brazil, Africa, and Europe.

equally well but whatever is in vogue, contemporary soul singers say, people seek it out, and search engines like Google have been very good to us, too."

Dusty Groove, to hear Wojcik tell it, is the result of a fluke. He was a fanatic record buyer and collector who would travel overseas and pay for his trips by bringing over records to sell. The business was started as an online enterprise, then open on weekends and, after five years, opened as a small full-fledged store in the south Wicker Park area.

For the first two years, none of the three principals took salaries. Wojcik was a radio DJ working on his doctorate. His dissertation was on the used record marketplace with plenty of "high theory economics of value, the exchange of memory. Putting things into quantifiable terms—why one record is worth \$5,000 vs. a \$2 record."

He wrote 100 pages and walked away. Obsessed with records, he was unsure where to take his knowledge and skill set. Radio was not the answer, he decided, and teaching was not as fulfilling as he thought it might be. "When you work behind the counter, you see that people look at music in a different way. We're always committed to music that falls through the cracks."

"As a young man, I was always going into record stores and listening to the clerk. I learned I liked to listen to what people had to say about what they liked. Being at retail, you have to use your ears as a survival tool."

—RICK WOJCİK, DUSTY GROOVE