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Record Store Day: 10 Great American Record Shops

By Douglas Wolk

This Saturday, April 16, is the fourth annual Record Store Day, when around 700 independent record shops across the country celebrate their continued existence as a cultural institution. Some will have sales, giveaways, performances and signings; upwards of 200 different limited-edition vinyl records and CDs will be appearing on their racks, too. Though most of the big music chains have shuttered their doors in recent years, many smaller, quirkier stores have stayed afloat by cultivating loyal customers and integrating themselves into local music scenes. Here are ten of the best.

Other Music: New York, NY

This downtown NYC fixture opened in 1995, in the most unlikely spot imaginable for an independent record store with a focus on underground, experimental and forgotten sounds: across the street from a mammoth Tower Records. Now Tower is long gone and Other endures, with a thriving mail-order business and a huge selection of otherwise-impossible-to-find CDs, records, DVDs, and even the odd cassette. "We have a really loyal following — customers who come in every week," says owner Chris Vanderloo. On Record Store Day, the store will be hosting an intimate performance by Regina Spektor and an exhibition of '80s-era fanzines.

Treehouse Records: Minneapolis, MN

Next weekend marks Treehouse's tenth anniversary in the Minneapolis spot that formerly housed another legendary record shop, Oar Folkjokeopus, which had been the Twin Cities' punk rock headquarters in the early '80s. "We've always been vinyl snobs here," says the store's manager Dan Cote, "and vinyl coming back into vogue has played into our hands. It's been easier for us to adapt than some of our peers. We took out an entire row of CD racks a few years ago and replaced them with record racks." Cote's most-anticipated Record Store Day release: the debut single by Wild Flag.

Dusty Groove America: Chicago, IL

Before it was a physical store, Dusty Groove was a mail-order outlet specializing in vintage soul, funk and jazz. This weekend, the shop marks its 15th anniversary with a performance by local jazz

heroes Phil Cohran and the Artistic Heritage Ensemble. "We have customers saying they're driving in from all over the Midwest," proprietor Rick Wojcik says. In conjunction with Chicago label Numero Group, Dusty Groove will also give customers a map of all the record shops in their neighborhood, including now-defunct "ghost record stores."

Waterloo Records & Video: Austin, TX

"We've always had a focus on the Austin music community, and I think that's built up a lot of loyalty," says Waterloo's John Kunz. Over the past decade, for instance, the store has sold more than 20,000 copies of local singer/guitarist Bob Schneider's album *Lonely Land*. This weekend, they'll host an in-store performance by alt-rock veterans the Toadies and a signing by guitar virtuoso Eric Johnson. And they're one of roughly a dozen Austin stores that are offering a Record Store Day special: bring in a receipt from one, you'll get a discount at the others.

Princeton Record Exchange: Princeton, NJ

Packed with records and CDs of every description, this bargain hunter's paradise has been around for more than 30 years. "When music became more price-sensitive, we started emphasizing our cheap CDs," says general manager Jon Lambert. "We try to make shopping here a comfortable experience, so it's fun to dig through the bins, but not overwhelming." His Record Store Day picks: limited-edition singles from Fela Kuti and funk guitarist Dennis Coffey.

Aquarius Records: San Francisco, CA

Established in 1970, the tiny, eccentrically selective Aquarius is a haven for obscure, extreme and atmospheric music. The store's reputation extends far beyond its Mission District neighborhood: more than half its business is now through mail-order. Aquarius is actually pressing a Record Store Day release of its own, a live CD by the New York psychedelic band White Hills. "Our customers are music obsessives, and they want physical items," says owner Allan Horrocks. "The way that people purchase or don't purchase music hasn't affected us to the extent that it might affect a place that deals more with Top 40 stuff."

Easy Street Records: Seattle, WA

Last year, Easy Street was selling a disc by local band The Head and the Heart on consignment; now the group is signed to the Seattle indie-rock label Sub Pop, and playing at the shop on Record Store Day to commemorate their album's official release. Easy Street's two main branches are in Seattle, but they also set up retail kiosks at performances across Washington State, including the annual Sasquatch! music festival — where many of the younger attendees have set foot in a record store, as manager Bob Major notes. The RSD release he's most excited about is the Foo Fighters' vinyl-only *Medium Rare*, a collection of cover songs.

Mississippi Records: Portland, OR

This tightly packed storefront is a vinyl buff's dream: it features an enormous but carefully curated selection of LPs and singles from around the world, an assortment of vintage turntables, a little wall of cassettes, and a solitary, tiny rack of CDs by Portland artists. Mississippi isn't participating in Record Store Day proper, but does have its own in-house label, reissuing vinyl records by the likes of garage rockers Dead Moon and one-man band Abner Jay. "We can vouch for almost everything in the shop — I think people trust that," says Mississippi's Karen Antunes. "And we have listening stations. People can come in and take their time."

Schoolkids Records: Raleigh, NC

Assistant manager Eric Tschudi reports that younger Schoolkids customers are usually looking for vinyl, which makes up about half its stock. Schoolkids has a reputation as an indie-rock outlet (perennial sellers include Neutral Milk Hotel and Drive-By Truckers), but they carry a range of bluegrass, country and Top 40 discs as well. On Record Store Day, there'll be four bands playing in the store, including Danish garage-rockers Raveonettes and rockabilly stalwarts the Dex Romweber Duo. "A lot of people have called about the Phish seven-inch single coming out that day," Tschudi says.

ear X-tacy: Louisville, KY

John Timmons grew up as a music fanatic in the '60s, buying records, then 8-track tapes, then cassettes and CDs. He opened ear X-tacy in 1985, and it's become the launch pad for a handful of Louisville bands that have gone on to wider fame, most notably My Morning Jacket. The store will be selling half the copies of a super-limited MMJ single coming out on Record Store Day. "The artists really do care about the physical, brick-and-mortar stores," Timmons says. "And our employees are true music junkies — they can talk to anybody about any sort of music. It's that personal interaction that's kept us going."

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