

A Dusty Groove documentary premieres in Chicago

Danielle Beverly's *Dusty Groove: The Sound of Transition* tells intimate stories about our deep connection to music.

By Aaron Cohen



Director Danielle Beverly in *Dusty Groove*

DANA LEONARD

In one scene from the 2019 documentary *Dusty Groove: The Sound of Transition*, Rick Wojcik sifts through a record collection in the Pill Hill basement of Grady Johnson, a jazz saxophonist and one of Chicago's first black

pharmacists. Wojcik owns the record store after which the film is named, and he frequents such spaces in the course of his job—much of his inventory consists of the jazz, R&B, and hip-hop albums he finds there.

In Johnson's home, Wojcik unearths something that brings him closer to the 93-year-old, who was then battling cancer (he passed away in 2014). It's an acetate disc of a largely forgotten Johnson performance, and the two of them listen to the music together—a deeply personal experience that exemplifies the kind of close connection the documentary aims to capture. The scene is the most moving in the film, but saying any more could spoil it.



The trailer for Dusty Groove: The Sound of Transition

Documentary director Danielle Beverly has seen Wojcik form many such bonds since her time working at Dusty Groove and Reckless Records in the 90s. Now an assistant professor of radio, television, and film at Northwestern University, she believes that her film shows how these exchanges go deeper than mere retail transactions.

"Rick has this very unique access to people's very personal lives and very intimate stories," Beverly says. "They summon him to come to their homes, sometimes their

storage spaces, sometimes the homes of their parents who have passed on. And they are often in delicate or sometimes difficult situations. They're selling their music, these things that once defined them—often prized possessions, rare collections—because they're undergoing some kind of change in their life."

Dusty Groove: The Sound of Transition

Director Danielle Beverly, Dusty Groove owner Rick Wojcik, and others will participate in a Q&A at the documentary's Chicago premiere. Fri 2/28, 7 PM, Chicago Cultural Center, Claudia Cassidy Theater, 78 E. Washington, free, all ages

Dusty Groove has been a fixture in Wicker Park for more than 20 years, but Wojcik says he preferred to keep the focus of the documentary away from himself. He describes the film as an antidote to the likes of *Pawn Stars* and *American Pickers*.

"On those shows, the dealers are the guys," Wojcik says. "No! The people selling this stuff, they're the ones with the important stories. All those shows are about people selling stuff, but the buyer being the central one. The stories that flow through people and their objects are far more fascinating."

Wojcik does more than buy records from around the city and the world to sell in his store. Another joyful sequence in the documentary depicts the day when he brought the historic south-side party and DJ contest Jazz in the Alley to a side street by Dusty Groove. From the mid-1950s through the end of the '70s, jazz fans had gathered in an alley off 51st Street, engaging in friendly rivalries to determine who could play the winning swing and bop tracks. Many of those veteran DJs reassembled outside Wojcik's shop on a sunny day in July 2016, and the scenes documenting the celebration in *Dusty Groove: The Sound of Transition* show how a shared public listening experience can strengthen community bonds.

"This goes back to me being 18 at WHPK," Wojcik says. "Being a kid who mostly knew rock music but cared about jazz, soul a little bit, and suddenly having all

these 50-, 60-year-old DJs on the radio station was fantastic. I couldn't be a punk-rock asshole—I had to mind my Ps and Qs. Their relation to records, vinyl culture was so amazing. Having a more professional relationship to that world continues to teach me so much more."



A still from the documentary: Dusty Groove owner Rick Wojcik (right) with jazz saxophonist and pharmacist Grady Johnson in Johnson's basement

DANIELLE BEVERLY

Dusty Groove: The Sound of Transition also tells a story about Dusty Groove cofounder J.P. Schauer, who as J.P. Chill hosted an influential hip-hop show (alongside Wojcik's R&B program) on WHPK in the late 1980s. Schauer came out as gay in his mid-40s, and the film's affectionate portrayal of his life after that big change includes scenes of him discarding boxes of his rap collection. In its conversations with Schauer, the documentary suggests that he established a new identity in part by getting rid of the records that had shaped the older one.

"When you have this persona and when that persona changes, sometimes the need to cloak oneself in that persona or wear those clothes is not needed," Beverly says. "J.P.'s story is like a butterfly emerging from a chrysalis. He becomes a new person."

Beverly adds that directing this documentary has helped her appreciate the profound emotion that Wojcik's work can stir up, both in him and in the people he's buying records from. It flies in the face of stereotypes about jaded record-store managers popularized by various adaptations of Nick Hornby's novel *High Fidelity*.

In many ways, Wojcik is the opposite of that character—rather than pigeonholing people or attempting to dictate good taste to them, he wants to consider and understand how they form their musical preferences.

"Everybody is so incredibly complicated, you just can't ever figure somebody out," he says. "I'm always learning and always fascinated by the complexity that makes this job a delight." 📺

Tags: Music Feature, Dusty Groove, Dusty Groove America, Dusty Groove: The Sound of Transition, Rick Wojcik, Danielle Beverly, Chicago Cultural Center, premiere, documentary, movie, records, record store, vinyl, Grady Johnson, Jazz in the Alley, J.P. Chill, J.P. Schauer, High Fidelity, Video