

## When bigger isn't better: Indie record stores move to a different beat

by Robb Frederick  
*The Collegian*

There's just something about the atmosphere in a small record store. The lights may be dimmer, the displays a little cheaper, and the sales floor a little smaller. But the differences between privately owned record stores and their larger retail counterparts carry into other areas -- most notably behind the counter, where knowledgeable sales clerks offer the service that -- in chain stores like National Record Mart and Musicland -- has typically gone the way of the 8-track tape.

Most neighborhood record stores are opened not as calculated business moves, but as outlets for one individual's passion for music. So chances are the guy behind the cash register in the black Metallica t-shirt knows what he's talking about. And, since traffic flow in these stores is usually pretty slow, chances are he's more eager to please than a pimply, part-time high-schooler who would rather be out cruising the docks.

Several independent record stores currently operate in the Erie area, providing personalized service and many other advantages not offered by major retail stores. These additional services include efficient ordering systems, opportunities to preview potential purchases, and savings on used recordings.

So if you're searching for a more obscure relic or a newer disc that's not commercial enough for the *Billboard* Top 30, keep the following stores in mind.

**Record Country**  
3306 Buffalo Rd.  
899-0293

Opened in 1978, Record Country is the area's oldest independent record store. Although the format is primarily compact disc and cassette, selected titles are also available on LP and 45 rpm records.

"We lean more toward hard rock and heavy metal," explains owner Mike Lyon, who operates the store with his wife, Debbi. Record Country's promotional displays herald new arrivals by Slayer and Lita Ford, but the store's catalog of approximately 2,000 titles also represents other musical styles, including a sizable collection of releases by local bands.

If a certain title can't be found on the store's cramped sales racks, it may be located through one of several mail-order catalogs available at Record Country.

"We can order anything in print," Lyon explains, "and about two-thirds of those orders can be shipped within a week." Some titles can be shipped the

next day, while others, including rare Japanese imports, may take up to two weeks. There is no additional charge for special orders, and deposits are generally not required.

Although Record Country does not offer a pre-purchase previewing policy, promotional copies of many new releases are available to familiarize shoppers with recordings.

**Dig Dios Cds and laser discs**  
2505 W. 12th at Yorktown  
Centre.  
835-2221

Somewhere in every music enthusiast's collection lies a long-untouched record or cassette that turned out to be quite different from the single that landed the artist on the charts. And as compact discs continue to gain popularity, the risk of buying an unfamiliar recording has become even more costly.

Through a unique service offered by Dig Dios, however, shoppers who are hesitant about purchasing unfamiliar discs can step up to a bank of stereo headphones and preview any recording found on the store's shelves.

"Customers can experiment with any disc," says owner Bill Baughman, who opened the store two years ago. "So they really can't get stuck with one that turns out to be a lot different from what they expected."

"Most stores can't even play certain selections over their sound systems, so shoppers can't hear those songs, and sales clerks won't become familiar with them, either."

The dominant format at Dig Dios is the compact disc, but a small selection of cassettes is also available. The store also carries a modest selection of video laser discs.

In addition to a catalog of more than 6,000 titles, Dig Dios sells used compact discs at a reduced rate.

"Used" is almost the wrong word," Baughman explains. "Since CDs suffer little wear and tear, customers get virtually the same recording quality for about half the price."

Unlike the lengthy waiting period that accompanies special orders at larger music stores, Dig Dios offers an extensive mail-order catalog of rare and imported material which can often be shipped within a week. No deposits are required, and no service charges are added to special orders.

**Boro Tunes**  
106 Meadville in Edinboro.  
734-4175

A quick glance at a college music chart may leave some radio listeners confused. Many college-oriented bands get by on word of mouth, never making their way into the upper regions of the pop charts. Since the



Craig Breter/The Collegian

**Just browsing:** Store owner Bill Baughman sifts through the sales rack at Dig Dios, one of several local private record shops.

audiences these bands attract are often limited, most record stores carry few, if any, college radio titles.

But Suc Writz, owner of Boro Tunes, hums a slightly different tune. Her shop, which is located minutes away from the Edinboro campus, carries an extensive selection of alternative music titles.

"We get a lot of kids from the college in here," she explains, "and most of them aren't interested in the more commercialized artists."

The store, which opened about two years ago, carries primarily compact discs and cassettes, most at prices considerably below what most retail chains charge.

Although the catalog of 2,000 discs and 5,000 cassettes includes a heavy dose of alternative music, Writz also carries releases by more traditional bands, as well as a generous selection of heavy metal titles.

If a particular disc isn't found on the shelves, Writz will include it in the several orders she fills each week. There is no service charge for special orders, which typically arrive within one week.

**Cruiser's**  
3008 Buffalo Rd.  
899-5724

Since the introduction of compact discs, the traditional vinyl LP has virtually become extinct. For die-hard vinyl loyalists, however, a visit to Cruiser's may help find that long-lost LP.

The atmosphere in Cruiser's comes closer to a basement storage cubbyhole than that of a modern record retailer. One wall is dominated by the 6,000 used LPs owner Gary Garis has amassed since opening the shop four years ago, and the crowded sales racks include a collection of more than 20,000 singles on the all-but-vanished 45 rpm format.

"The LP is a dying breed," explains Garis, "but a fair percentage of customers still prefer the vinyl format."

In addition to the vast catalog of LPs, Cruiser's carries both new and used cassettes and compact discs.

"About half of our titles are used," Garis says. The store accepts used recordings on all formats and offers two-for-one trades on used CDs and tapes. Cruiser's also provides a pre-purchase preview policy and an efficient ordering system. Orders are placed once or twice each week, so many titles can be shipped within a week. No deposits or service charges are added.

Although some of the services these stores offer may be trivial, they can be invaluable for music enthusiasts in search of a release that is not currently on the pop charts. But even more important is the personalized service that these shops offer.

Since the clerk behind the counter is often the owner, the search for an import or an out-of-print title becomes not an inconvenience, but a challenge.

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