

Canada Carves Its RSD Identity

by Andrea Trace

The third Saturday in April. Here it comes. This is Record Store Day's sixth year and the fifth for us north of the 49th. It's a banner year for Canada, heralding the new RecordStoreDayCanada.com site, a fledgling Facebook page and Twitter feed. This is also the year Canadian labels stepped up big with Canada-only exclusives (see the two-page spread with title info). Plus, our official Record Store Day T-shirt is a collaboration with Rush that will be globally available at the greatest record stores in the world. And that's just awesome. (I'm getting one.) ¶ Life in the world of independent record retail is busy, from the office to the sales floor, from the back room receiver to the counter clerk. Everyone has too much to do; everyone is doing two or three jobs instead of one. So, rather than phoning **RSD head honcho Michael Kurtz**, we caught up via email. Frankly, his answers were so well-phrased that this article wrote itself. Which is good because—did I mention?—with Record Store Day almost here, I'm kinda busy.

What was the genesis of Record Store Day?

Bryan Burkert, the owner of the Sound Garden in Baltimore, was the Chairman of the Dept. of Record Stores six years ago, and he said to me, "Record stores are now irrelevant in the minds of most people, and the media coverage of the music business is all negative. Do something about it." So, I started asking different folks who run record stores what we should do. The idea that turned into Record Store Day was first pitched by Chris Brown, the guy who runs Bull Moose up in Maine. Chris had noticed what the indie comic book stores had done with Free Comic Day, and thought we should try and do a similar event. There was much back and forth initially about the name "Record Store Day," as some folks weren't comfortable being pigeonholed as a "record store." After all, indie stores sell all kinds of things now. It took a little time, but I was able to get everyone to understand that Record Store Day was the right name and that people would understand quickly who we are if we went with it. It worked, and there's been no looking back ever since.

What came first: the coalition or the idea? RSD is a joint cooperative formed by members of CIMS [Coalition of Independent Music Stores] and AIMS [Alliance of Independent Media Stores], yes?

There are several indie record store coalitions in the USA. I happen to run the Dept. of Record Stores, and we manage Record Store Day in cooperation with the guys who run the CIMS and AIMS indie coalitions. This partnership is key, as every one of these coalitions represents a different group of indie record stores and their perspectives. For example, Eric Levin is the guy who runs AIMS, and Eric was the first one to say that RSD should focus on vinyl. In the beginning, I had reservations, as there weren't a lot of 7-inch singles being sold in record stores seven years ago. Eric's intuition was proven right, and today we sell over a million dollars in 7-inch singles on Record Store Day each year. If I'd said to someone years ago that we will create a day to celebrate music and sell over a million dollars worth of 7-inch singles on that day... I would've been laughed out of the room.

How did RSD go global? Was that a U.S. push, or did other countries approach you?

The Dept. of Record Stores is the largest indie coalition, and the only one to partner with indie retailers in Canada. The international aspect of the experience of working with Canadians is inadvertently what led to the huge success of RSD in Europe and Japan. If the folks at Sunrise had not been open to working with an ugly American like me, RSD would probably never have happened internationally. They made it seem possible, and when Billy Bragg agreed to celebrate RSD in the U.K., we knew it was going to take off there. Record Store Day is now almost bigger in France and the U.K. than it is here in the USA, and it's celebrated on every continent except for Antarctica.

In your experience with independent record stores around the world, what are the differences and similarities between the indie cultures of different countries?

I've learned that life is the most exciting when you open yourself up to other people's cultures. We all share similarities, but we *all* demand to be inde-



The 2013 Record Store Day Tee



Created exclusively for Record Store Day by Rush.

Artists and labels have embraced Record Store Day with enthusiasm. Clearly, independent record stores are important to the major players. Why do they care about small-scale, local retail?

There have been studies that have proven that independent businesses generate more income and jobs than larger corporations. This income and these jobs are what make it possible for families to thrive and for communities to exist. I recently went to France, where I was met by the French Minister of Culture and presented with the honor of becoming a Knight in France's Order of Arts and Humanities for my work with Record Store Day. I think the reason that I was given this great honor was because the French understand and acknowledge the importance of neighborhoods and communities, and this was their way of saying, "You've done a good job." I think the reason the artists and the big companies all support Record Store Day is because, deep down, they know the French are right. Well, and also because Record Store Day is a hell of a lot of fun.

pendent and respected for our unique vision of the world. Record Store Day works because artists around the world create special releases for their fans, and Record Store Day then celebrates these releases. Each country has their own artist that they are most excited about, and RSD respects that and encourages them to embrace their uniqueness. For example, the band Triggerfinger is huge in Belgium and the Netherlands, and they are now the Dutch Ambassadors of RSD, releasing their own special RSD records.

What are the goals you are most happy to have reached? What are the roadblocks that still stand in the way?

I am thrilled that Record Store Day is now one of the most anticipated and enjoyed music holidays around the world. The roadblocks are ones that the music industry has imposed on physical products. They need to figure out how to coordinate to allow indie record stores to have the same

freedoms and access to commerce that they provide digital distributors. It's almost inconceivable to think like this right now, but the counterrevolution has started and indie record stores are leading the way.

What is the future for RSD? Will you be expanding into the film/DVD market?

By working with Rush on the creation of RSD's first official T-shirt, Sunrise has once again taught us to be open-minded and think differently. I expect that this partnership will lead to the development of more cool RSD products. I don't know what they are yet, but I'm excited to know that they are coming. And as soon as this year's Record Store Day is over, we will begin working on our big Black Friday campaign; and, yes, there will be DVDs released as part of Record Store Day. [The official film of Record Store Day 2013 is *Last Shop Standing: The Rise, Fall and Rebirth of the Independent Record Shop*.]

My thanks to Michael

for taking the time during this wild RSD season to answer a few questions. Also a big shout-out to Carrie Colliton for all her hard work, year round in the service not just of Record Store Day, but indie retail day-to-day; to Chris Brown (that dude from Bull Moose in Maine), who did a ton of work on *THE SPREADSHEET*; and to Tim Baker, Chairman of Record Store Day in Canada for "hours of labour."