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Used music, book store Diskovery to close after 32 years in Allston-Brighton

Posted by Matt Rocheleau May 11, 2012 09:03 AM

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(Matt Rocheleau for Boston.com)

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

When Yolanda Stratter opened shop in Boston three decades ago, sales of physical copies of books, movies and music thrived. But, outdone by digitalization, the products she offers at her store, [Discovery](#), have since fallen into obscurity.

“There are really no places you can go anymore to find this stuff,” said customer Nick Garbien, as the 23-year-old Brighton resident stood in one of the store’s narrow aisles lined with overflowing shelves and cluttered stacks of used vinyl records, books, CDs, cassettes and VHS tapes.

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Diskovery, 569 Washington St. in Brighton.



Soon, there will be one less place selling those late-20th century artifacts.

Diskovery plans to close within the next month or two, according to its owner.

The shop operated in Allston Village for more than 25 years. Citing rent increases, the business was forced to relocate to a similarly-sized store five years ago. It moved about two miles west to its current home in the Oak Square section of Brighton, an area where Stratter said consumer and tourist traffic is “dead” by comparison to the store’s original setting.

“Nobody reads any more. They don’t buy music,” said Stratter, a longtime Allston resident from Lima, Peru. “The kids come in once in a while to support a small business, but, a lot of them, they don’t have money.”

“But, I love it. I love music and books. It’s a nice place. I’m happy. Nice people,” she continued. “It’s been a long time here. There’s good stuff still left here.”

The business opened in 1980.

Back then, literature was read only in print, though some could be listened to as the audio book market was getting underway. VHS, having just defeated Betamax, captured the videotape market. And, gramophone records remained the prevailing music medium, amid growing use of cassettes and shortly before compact discs took over.

A lot has changed.

Today, about one in every five Americans 16 and older say they have read an e-book, according to the Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project. An equal percentage of Americans say they had not read any book in the past year. About one in 10 consume audiobooks.

Print remains the most common way Americans report reading long-form writing. But, as print books sales have declined recently, e-book sales have grown rapidly, more than doubling last year alone, according to the Association of American Publishers.

VHS is nearly obsolete following the advent of the DVD, which faces pressures from Blu-ray technology. And, those disc markets must now compete with digital downloading and streaming.

Last year, for the first time, physical music sales were surpassed by digital sales, which accounted for 50.3 percent of all music purchased in 2011, according to Nielsen SoundScan.

Meanwhile, vinyl record sales accounted for just 1.2 percent of all album sales last year.

Records have made a comeback during the past several years due to demand from audiophiles and vintage lovers. When 3.9 million sold last year, it marked the fourth straight year that vinyl album sales set an all-time high, according to Nielsen, but the company did not start tracking sales until 1991, well after vinyl's heyday.

On top of those gloomy numbers and along with slowed sales figures witnessed in her own shop, Stratter says her mobility has become more limited as she ages, though she declined to say just how old she is.

"I need a rest. I need a vacation," said Stratter, noting how her four brothers and three sisters have been pushing for her to close her store so she can cut her losses and take a break.

Throughout the store's 32-year run, she said she has been its lone steady employee. The store is open daily from noon to 9 p.m. Her pet cats are always there, sometimes patrolling the store, sometimes sleeping on the job. But, they're not on the payroll.

And, there's not much room for anyone else.

The store is crammed with inventory. Every item is used, purchased by Stratter over the years from people she either knew well beforehand, or, if not, is

familiar with now.

“I’m a compulsive shopper,” she said, smiling. “I like a good deal.”

Navigating the store’s constricted aisles lined with loosely piled items, there is a fear that one misstep could cause a domino series of retro media avalanches.

Stratter estimated, perhaps modestly, that she has about 5,000 records, 5,000 books, and 5,000 CDs in her store, along with hundreds of cassettes, VHS tapes, some DVDs, comics and posters.

Though it may not appear so upon first glance, there is an order to the chaos. During a recent visit, Stratter toured the store as music from renowned jazz pianist Art Tatum’s 1940 album “Solos” played overhead. Accounting for every stack, box, pile, row and shelf, she named the various genres her products are organized into.

Last February, a [water main broke](#) beneath Washington Street and flooded some nearby buildings, including Diskovery’s basement. Album covers and book pages stored below the first floor showroom were stuck together. Merchandise was unsalvageable.

“A lot was ruined,” Stratter said. “I don’t even want to think about it.”

She had no insurance to recover her losses. It was then she realized she would need to shutter her store and in recent weeks, posted signs announcing steep discounts in order to unload some products before closing.

She clings to a bit of hope she can reopen somewhere else, someday. Her shop’s still-massive stock contains some precious items, including rare, original vinyl records, with album jackets and sleeves, in mint condition. Many are from the 1960s.

Stratter pointed out a wall lined with some of the more notable pieces of her store’s collection, where records by the Beatles, Elvis, Jimi Hendrix, Pink Floyd, Nina Simone, Miles Davis, Jerry Garcia and Guns N’ Roses hung. Most are priced between \$40 and \$60.

Nick Garbien graduated from the New England Institute of Art in Brookline last week and hopes to go into the music licensing field. One of the store’s

“regulars,” he said he has been buying both books and music, namely records, from the store for about the past two years.

“I’m an audiophile nut. The audio quality [on a record] is much better than what you can get on a CD or MP3,” he said. “And, there’s pretty wide array of music here.”

Garbien said he will be among those who will sorely miss Discovery when it follows the footsteps of many stores like it.

“The modern record store is kind of dying,” he said.

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