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Independent thinking: can music shops survive on today's high street?

Small retailers everywhere are struggling to compete with online competition. But one classical music store in north London is surviving - and even thriving

Linda Grant The Guardian Tuesday 6 December 2016

Three years ago Ian Rosenblatt went into his local music shop in Muswell Hill, north London. He came out having bought a couple of CDs and, to his own surprise, the shop. Rosenblatt, a classical music lover, had been chatting with the owner and learned he was planning to close it down.

Today, “Les Aldrich Music », which has had premises on that spot since May 1945, the optimistic month the war ended, is one of the last surviving music shops in north London, an Aladdin’s cave where you can buy vinyl, CDs, sheet music and instruments.

In the 1960s it sold the Davies brothers Ray and Dave – of the Kinks – who lived nearby, their first guitars. Today it employs Enrico Savoncelli, a luthier, repairer of stringed instruments. And, if you play or just listen to music it is a place to visit and cherish, an unlikely hold-over from a disappearing era when notes were held in physical places: wood, strings, paper, grooved black plastic or a shiny silver disc.

Independents of all kinds are being driven from the high street. Can small shops like these, run by individual enthusiasts in a seven-day-a-week trading environment, survive in the internet age?

Clearly there aren’t enough entrepreneurs to save the dying high street trade in recorded music even if the customers were there, but the business of sheet music and instrument sales, hire and repairs – which require the advice and assistance of skilled and knowledgeable salespeople – can’t exist exclusively on the internet.

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