



ICON

Tower Records

By Andi Teran

DEAR TOWER RECORDS,

Speaking on behalf of those mourning your hallowed presence on our city streets let it be known—for the record—that we miss you. Whether browsing the new releases or listening to a CD because of the cover art; whether killing time on the floor with a music magazine or impulse-buying an Edward Scissorhands doll just because it looked lonely next to the cash register; whether we were there for discovery or escape, purpose or inspiration, your doors were open for all of us...

Tower Records was the first, and most famous, mammoth music store. From humble beginnings in 1960s Sacramento, where record seller Russ Solomon named the store after his father's drugstore, it later expanded to San Francisco and then continued to grow—coast to coast and continent to continent—into the music behemoth it's remembered as today. Instantly recognizable with oblique red letters atop a background of sunshine yellow, Tower sold music from every genre and every country, for every denomination and every age range. Soccer moms brought kids interested in the new Ace of Base, teenagers hung out and honed their "cool" palettes with The Cure, and foreign visitors always found a section devoted to their homeland. In addition to vinyl, tapes, and CDs, Tower added cultured books and periodicals. In bigger cities, Tower Video provided a double whammy, selling mainstream and independent films—not to mention those lurking behind the doors marked "18 and Over Only."

Tower Records brought us closer to music; it also brought the music to us. In stores world wide, local and touring bands would roll up to play live. There was Aerosmith or New Kids on the Block wrapping people around the block at Tower Boston. Jeff Buckley memorably shook the windowpanes—a capella, mind you—in Austin. That all ended in the United States last December when, suffering since the birth of conveniently downloadable music, Tower Records closed its doors just months after filing for bankruptcy. While a victim to the tangible product it sold, Tower Records was one of the first music purveyors to take its business to the Internet, albeit not very successfully. Tower.com continues to operate online under a separate entity, and standing stores still thrive in Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Columbia, and Ireland. Those of us in the States, however, hold on to our memories.

The White Stripes tapped into that nostalgia last June, playing an intimate show in the shuttered remains of the renowned Tower Records on Sunset Boulevard. Singer Jack White was said to be in awe of performing in the empty shell-of-a-store. "Can I get an amen for records you can hold in your hands?" he shouted to the crowd. *Amen, Tower, Amen.*

ILLUSTRATION BY JULIA ROTHMAN