

Arts & Entertainment



Record stores in Edmonton

The Gateway Guide

by Mike Spindloe

Why bother writing about record stores in Edmonton, you might well ask. Well, although it's true that our city is overrun with mall-type Top 40 shops, there are half a dozen or so places that are really worth seeking out. It is in these places that you will find the recordings that aren't tearing up the charts: a good selection of jazz and classical music, blues, folk, eclectic rock and so on.

These are the places haunted by vinyl junkies; the kind of people who own more records than they could possibly play in the next ten years. But even for the casual consumer of music, knowing about these places can be useful.

In the interest of fairness, you'll find every place in town listed herein, except for individual branches of the aforementioned Top 40 shops. If you've seen one of those you've seen them all. I did do some comparison shopping on prices in the hopes of including a price chart, but so many places did not have copies of the pre-selected titles (including some current bestsellers) that such a chart would have been riddled with omissions. Therefore, comments on prices are general and secondary to the concept of imparting an idea of strengths and weaknesses of different places (although you will find a few hints on saving money).

Record stores can be divided into two general categories: those which carry only new, factory-sealed products, and those which carry secondhand records.

Record stores now also sell more cassettes and compact discs (CDs) than records

(in most cases). Cassettes have been out-selling LPs for about three years now, and CDs are already doing the same in some areas such as reissues and classical recordings. Whether or not vinyl is actually going to join the dinosaur in extinction remains an open question, but one thing is clear: any retailer who hopes to compete and survive must now stock all three formats.

A few notes about imports are necessary. As the name implies, imports are recordings manufactured elsewhere and brought into the country for two main reasons. One is that many people consider foreign pressings, notably Japanese, British, or German, to be superior to domestic pressings. The other is that many recordings are not currently available domestically or were never released here. Paying the price for a new imported copy of a recording is more convenient and often less expensive than searching for a rare secondhand copy of an older album.

Many of the classic American jazz and blues pressings are sadly only available on European or Japanese pressings, as well as the work of literally hundreds of British (mainly) and European rock bands who never garnered the substantial following here necessary to make a domestic release of their work profitable for the major record labels.

Thus a willingness to carry, or at least special order, imports becomes a virtual necessity for record stores which intend to cater to serious record collectors. On the other hand, dealing exclusively in imports is a risky proposition, as several ex-owners of bankrupt import shops in Edmonton can readily attest.

Here, then, is the current line-up of Edmonton retailers, in alphabetical order:

A & A Records & Tapes: One of the largest chain stores in the country, these are typically mall-type Top 40 shops. They do have the best sales, however. Watch for advertised specials, often requiring coupons, which appear in either the Thursday daily newspapers or the TV guides that come with the weekend newspapers. Lately they've developed an annoying habit of making some coupons valid only for cassettes. The stores are uniformly tacky, seeming arbitrarily stocked and garishly lit; "Canada's Greatest Record Stores."

Cheap Thrills: 8905 118 Avenue. This place carries mainly used records and tapes, plus some new and used CDs. It's also a bookstore. New CDs are all \$17, used ones \$13, which is actually pretty

good. The used tapes are cheap (\$5 and less if you buy more) and the selection is reasonable. The used records are often ridiculously overpriced, and they've been resealed to protect against damage by over-zealous customers. A surly clerk at the front desk grudgingly allows you to open them for inspection, muttering that everything is guaranteed. Still, it's worth a visit if there's something you need that you can't find anywhere else, and for the new CDs. Buying and trading policies are also suspect. There seems to be no system except to see what they can get away with.

Discus: West Edmonton Mall only. Mall-type Top 40 shop. Even as a joke, this place is not funny.

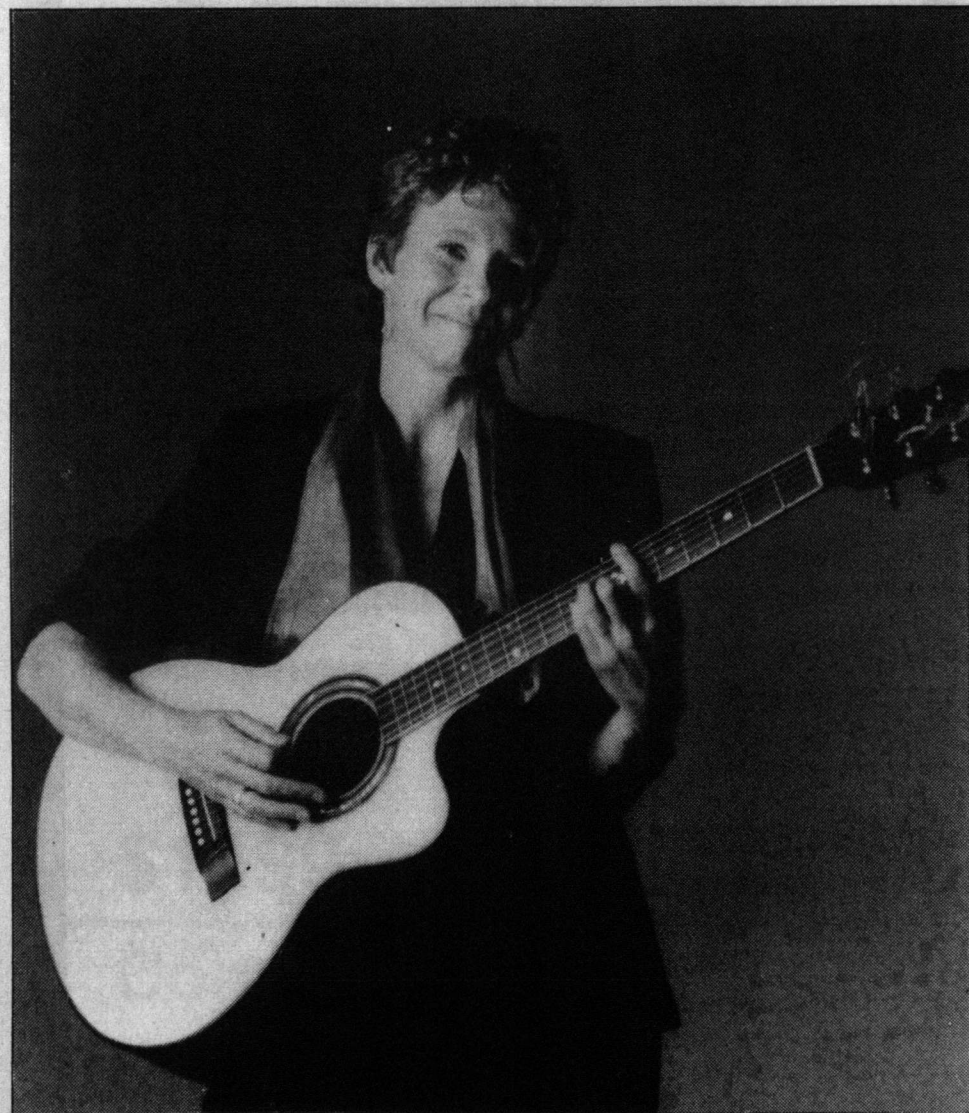
Freecloud Music: 10764 101 Street. Located on Edmonton's own "record store

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The interior of Freecloud; specializing in vintage '50s and '60s pressings, they are one of Edmonton's most interesting record stores.

Rob Galbraith



Folk and blues singer Heather Bishop supports a variety of causes. She will appear at the SUB Theatre Friday night.

Bishop sings for NDP

by Mike Spindloe

Heather Bishop has been involved in music virtually all her life, but didn't think she could sing until a vacancy in her band forced her into the spotlight. That was almost 15 years ago, and Bishop's voice, ironically, is now considered by critics to be perhaps her strongest asset as a performer.

At that time, however, she was playing with a band called Walpurgis Night, with an all-female lineup — a fairly radical proposition in the early seventies. But then, Bishop has always charted her own course, whether or not anyone described that course as radical.

Her performance at SUB Theatre on Friday night will be at a benefit concert for NDP candidate Halyna Freeland. She frequently performs at benefit concerts for such organizations as Amnesty International and the Women's Disarmament Campaign, to name just a couple. Of her association with the NDP, she says, "they are the political party in Canada which is the closest to what I believe." She does not feel that having a political candidate speaking at her show (as Freeland will do Friday night) detracts from the event as entertainment. A query on this issue evokes a simple, "that's OK."

Bishop now has six albums to her credit, all released on her own Mother of Pearl label. Her latest is *A Taste of the Blues*, which includes compositions by Joan Armatrading, Billie Holiday, and Connie

Kaldor in addition to several of Bishop's own. The album, as the title suggests, shows Bishop moving back towards the roots influences of her early records. She describes it as "a natural mix of everything — for an audience that has been asking me to do more blues."

Bishop's willingness to go out of her way to please her audience is not limited to blues fans. Two of her six records are children's albums. These arose from her performances at children's festivals where, she says, "the kids insisted that I should make an album for them; it wasn't fair that I should only make records for grown-ups."

At 40, her years of perseverance paid off in a nomination for a Juno Award for Most Promising Female Vocalist. She laughs at the irony involved in the category: "that's just the way it works in Canada."

Bishop is also an accomplished visual artist; the recipient of a BFA specializing in pottery and oil painting, she has painted three of her own album covers. Lately, however, music has left her no time for other artistic pursuits: "I tour so much that I just don't have the time. I'm usually on the road about 10 months of the year."

Her Friday night concert will see her performing with guitarist Sherry Shute, a veteran of several Eastern-based rock bands. Shute has been with Bishop for about a year, and was part of a full band which Bishop toured for the first time last year. "Before that I was performing solo for about eight years, and I got tired of travelling alone."

Jennifer Berezan will open the show.