

# The Power of Books

Local bookstore fights for livelihood against large corporate chain stores

By JEFF RANDALL  
Staff writer

The story has been told a thousand times: the mom-and-pop store run out of business by the monolithic corporate business that just moved into town.

If Jim McKee and Linda Hillegass have their way, though, that story won't be told in Lincoln.

McKee and Hillegass are co-owners of Lee Booksellers, a locally owned chain of bookstores that has been in business since 1979.

But that 19-year run in the retail book business is now in jeopardy, particularly following the opening of Lincoln's second Barnes & Noble Booksellers at 27th Street and Pine Lake Road.

"It's too early to tell how badly we'll be hit by their new store," Hillegass said. "But we're probably

going to be hit.

"And it's not going to be good."

When McKee and Hillegass, a married couple, opened their first stores in East Park Plaza (at 66th and O streets) and Edgewood (at 56th Street and Highway 2), they were operating just a pair of Lincoln's

many locally owned book shops.

They met with success, and in 1990 they opened a third store on Cotner and A streets.

But about four years ago, Barnes & Noble made its initial move into Lincoln, and that move was accompanied by the closing of shop doors throughout Lincoln.

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Now, McKee and Hillegass own the last three locally owned new-book stores in Lincoln.

"We're part of a dying breed," McKee said.

And that breed is dying quickly. According to the American

"It's too early to tell how badly we'll be hit by (Barnes & Noble's) new store. It's not going to be good."

-Linda Hillegass

Lee Booksellers co-owner



Shoppers enter the new Barnes & Nobles Booksellers, located at 27th Street and Pine Lake Road, Sunday afternoon. The store opened Nov. 18.

DAWN DIETRICH/DN

Booksellers Association, roughly 50 percent of independent bookstores have closed their doors in the last five years. And the ABA predicts that another 50 percent will close in the next five years.

Online shopping and the growth of chain stores share the blame for this decline in mom-and-pop businesses, which has affected retailers in nearly every conceivable realm — from clothing to records to grocery stores.

And the efforts to combat the problem have made less than a notable dent.

When the first Barnes & Noble opened in Lincoln, Lee Booksellers "did everything we could think of," McKee said.

"We launched a huge advertising campaign. We poured thousands of dollars into promotion.

"And nobody noticed."

Sales at Lee Booksellers dropped off by about 25 percent. And they've never recovered.

But despite the severe impact of big-name competition, McKee and Hillegass have soldiered on.

They've added service, both in-store and through mail order. They've attempted to stir shoppers' sentiments for the local underdog. And, to some extent, they've been successful.

"A lot of customers tell me that they stay with us because we are local, and because they like our friendliness," Hillegass said.

Whether those customers will stay with the opening of another Barnes & Noble remains to be seen.

"It's too early to tell," she said. "After Christmas, we'll have a better idea.

"We're approaching the make-or-

break time of year."

And after the dust from the holiday season and the construction of South Pointe Pavilions has settled, McKee said, the damage that Lee Booksellers suffers will truly be measurable.

"For now, (the new Barnes & Noble) is sort of just out there in a plowed field," McKee said. "Once the rest of the shopping center opens, we'll be able to see just how hard it's going to be."

Until then, Lee Booksellers will keep competing, selling and trying to come up with ways to keep their loyal customers loyal.

"We've just entered a tough time," McKee said, "a time of big-box businesses.

"We're not going to whine about it; we're not going to give up. We're just going to keep trying."

## Delights, duds part of this year's music scene

Swing makes a return; artists rush to record before the century ends.

By SEAN MCCARTHY  
Staff writer

Led by Master P's phalanx army at No Limit Records, rap and hip-hop officially dominated the charts in 1998.

Many big-name artists scurried to make their last music statements before the 20th century ran out. Snoop Dogg, Sheryl Crow, Garbage, Pearl Jam, Smashing Pumpkins, Dave Matthews Band, Method Man and Tori Amos were just some of the hordes of new releases out this year.

Ska and techno took a back seat to swing. And the ultimate swinger, Frank Sinatra, went to that eternal jam session in the sky. Public Enemy made a confident return with the excellent, "He Got Game" soundtrack, and, love her or hate her, Courtney Love returned to the rock world with Hole's album, "Celebrity Skin."

Meanwhile, heavy metal made a comeback, and Madonna got spiritual, releasing an album moral people could actually listen to with "Ray of

Light." And while 1998 unfortunately answered the "What the hell happened to Vanilla Ice?" question (he released a "KORNY" album called "Hard to Swallow"), it provided some damn good music.

### 10 CDs that mattered in 1998

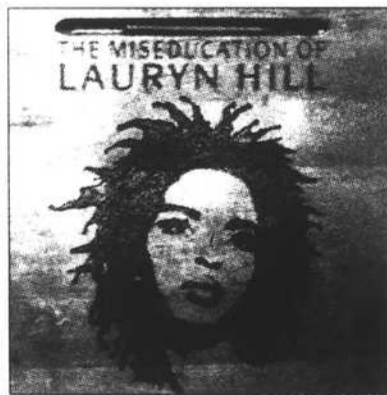
10. Mark Lanegan — "Scraps at Midnight" (Sub Pop Records). Musicians from great bands who release solo projects tend to lack the focus of their group works. But Screaming Trees bellowed Mark Lanegan released a morose, brooding and absorbing album that was the ultimate after-hours soundtrack.

9. Mercy Rule — "The Flat Black Chronicles" (Caulfield Records).

Fine, so it came out last year, but this year was the first time Nebraskans could sample Mercy Rule's stab at the big leagues. Helped by producer Lou Giordano (Sugar), "Flat Black" was filled with pop smarts, rich arrangements and great lyrics. Heidi Ore's voice never sounded as full as it does on this album.

8. Pearl Jam — "Yield" (Epic Records). Pearl Jam changed many things to get it back in the sales league of bands such as Matchbox 20 this year. Members reluctantly agreed to tour in some Ticketmaster-spon-

sored arenas. The band released a video. Eddie Vedder dropped his tortured-artist act in favor of a more humble, accessible persona. And, best of all, it released its most consistent album since "Ten." The result? The album barely went platinum. Five million fans' loss is one million fans' gain.



7. Lauryn Hill — "The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill" (Ruffhouse Records). Possibly the densest album of the year. Produced, written and performed by Lauryn Hill, "Miseducation" was a declaration of independence from the soulful member of the Fugees.

Even after a dozen or so listens, Hill's album has much to offer in ways of new surprises. Part Bob Marley, part throwback to legends such as Aretha Franklin and all '90s mentality, this album topped critics and sales charts for the summer. No other album was as deserving this year.

6. PJ Harvey — "Is This Desire?" (Island Records). PJ Harvey has

stretched her musical ambitions for every album she releases to cover everything in the vast expanse between American blues and European techno. So it's no surprise that her fifth album found her in somewhat familiar territory. Somewhere smack in the middle of the lush, operatic "To Bring You My Love" and the Brillo-like abrasiveness of "Rid of Me," "Is This Desire?" may have sounded a tad too familiar to fans, but it still rocked.

5. Sheryl Crow — "The Globe Sessions" (A&M Records). Every music lover has one or two guilty-pleasure selections they listen to when their friends are not around. Motley Crue, Hanson, Iron Maiden — for me it's Sheryl Crow. As much as I didn't want to like "The Globe Sessions," Crow released a great, well-crafted album about longing for isolation. Add in her soulful, hurt voice, mix in a killer cover of a Bob Dylan outtake, and "The Globe Sessions" turns out to be the biggest surprise of the year.

4. "Miles From Our Home" — Cowboy Junkies (Geffen). Eternal mopers Cowboy Junkies have kept a low profile since 1988 with their "The Trinity Sessions" release. But this beautiful requiem for close friend/artist Townes Van Zandt proved the band is capable of doing

more than killer Lou Reed covers.

3. Massive Attack — "Mezzanine" (Virgin Records). Just when people were about to write off these Bristol pioneers of the silly-named genre, trip-hop, they surface with a great album. While Portishead and Tricky have released higher-profile releases, "Mezzanine" was dark and arresting enough to put them back in the forefront of the trance-ending genre. Adding Elizabeth Fraser of the Cocteau Twins to the lineup certainly didn't hurt.

2. Liz Phair — "Whitechocolatespaceegg" (Matador). Like a marathon episode of "South Park," shock value has less of a half life than the gallon of milk in your refrigerator. Wisely shunning an attempt to out-shock her 1993 classic, "Exile in Guyville," "Whitechocolatespaceegg" instead

stunned listeners with Phair's wide range of musical influences. Straight-up pop ala the Go-Gos, quirky, folksy arrangements and lusty rockers decorated Phair's latest album. And with an honest, direct account on the horrors and joys of growing up and marriage, "Whitechocolatespaceegg" was well worth the 4½-year wait.



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