

# B-Side Records: A small business with an impactful history

By **Mary Bosch**  
STAFF WRITER

Despite being forced to move in 2022 to a new 514 State Street location, B-Side Records is thriving in its new home.

“It was one of those situations where it was a good thing to be kicked out,” said Steve Manley, the store’s owner. “It’s bigger, it’s cleaner, it’s a better building, and it’s a better landlord,” because “it’s a family, not a development corporation.”

“I think people feel less claustrophobic here. They’re less uncomfortable about just coming in,” he added. “This space is more open and more welcoming,” while the previous space felt more “bottlenecked.”

The move was tricky, with over 5,000 records and a very delicate neon sign needing transport.

Once it was all in the new store, “it was a puzzle.” Manley worked to “figure out how to make it look similar with the same fixtures, bins and cabinetry.”

After the store’s opening in 1982, Manley immediately started hanging around, introducing himself to the original owners and securing a part time job. From that point, he became a manager and then owner.

“I’ve always loved music and loved sharing music, so it was kind of the perfect thing for me to do.”



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A close-up shot of a B-Side Records tote bag illustration is photographed.



CORA SPYCHALLA/THE DAILY CARDINAL

CDs, ranging in varying genres from Country to Blues, are displayed along B-Side’s walls.



CORA SPYCHALLA/THE DAILY CARDINAL

Steve Manley, the owner of B-Side Records in Madison, Wis.

With the creation of music downloads, the 2000s were a rough period for record stores all over the world. Manley cites Record Store Day, first occurring April 19, 2008, as the spark of revival. Celebrated at independently owned record stores around the world, it’s meant to celebrate the unique culture of record stores often with limited edition vinyl and CDs.

“I was so skeptical, but it really is the point when vinyl started coming back,” Manley said.

Now his primary customers are college students, not just “eccentric old guys.” Although this is partly due to location, it’s also something he never expected.

People find community in music, and the record shop is another extension of that.

“People get excited about shared experiences and shared tastes, and it’s fun for people to listen or search together,” Manley added.



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A diverse arraignment of records, CDs and vinyls sit neatly on the record store's shelves.



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Scott Lonzaga, a sophomore at UW-Madison, looks through a stack of vinyls while shopping in the store.



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A variety of alphabetized CDs sit stacked together on shelves.

Manley attributes B-Side's 41 years of success to the "rustic" feel of the store.

"Some people appreciate a local eccentric business as opposed to a corporate entity that just plants their franchises everywhere," Manley said.

"It's kind of fun to have people walk into a place that isn't designed by some corporate entity. It's designed by real people who were into it, and I think that makes a difference," Manley added.

The shop has a large variety of music — from David Bowie to John Coltrane to Mitski — as well as styles from reggae to German techno, so there's something for everyone. The 40-year-old B&W speakers are always playing tunes, adding to the ambience of the place.

On the wall is a cross stitch tapestry of the original interior of the old location. The image pays homage and shows how far they've come.

Although they've faced hardship, B-Side hopes to stay in business for years to come.

"We're just happy to still be here after 41 years," Manley said. "We're lucky we made it through the worst part."



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