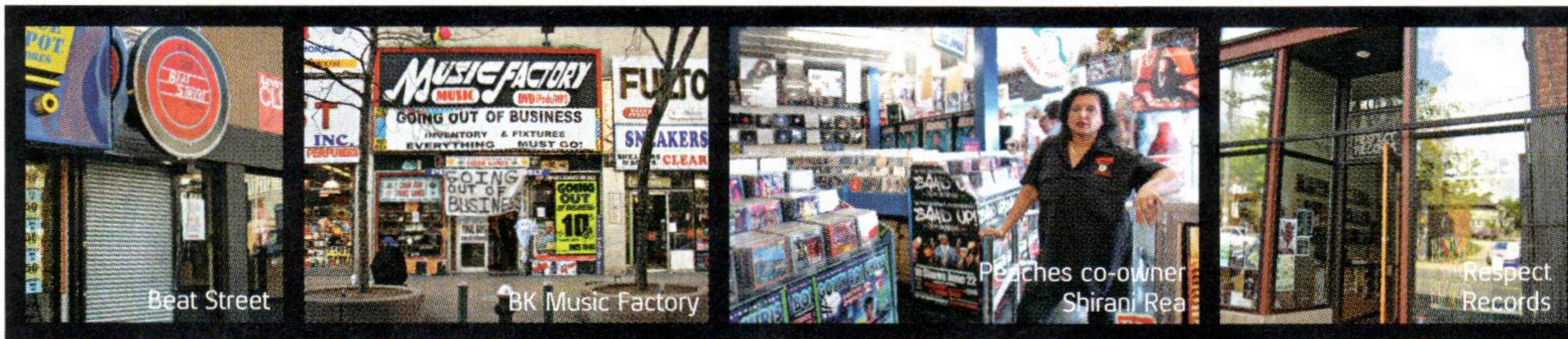


Where Are They Now?

RENOWNED HIP-HOP RECORD STORES CLOSE SHOP.



For DJs and hip-hop junkies in Brooklyn, October 2006 brought some of the grimest news since the death of Biggie. Beat Street, an iconic presence on BK's famed Fulton Street for nearly two decades, shut down. But it wasn't the only one. While megachains like Tower Records were liquidated last year in the face of a changing marketplace, mom-and-pop hip-hop record stores were also suffering.

In mid-February of this year, New York minichain Music Factory closed its final location near Beat Street. Its Queens store—once frequented by Jam Master Jay and LL Cool J—shut down this past December, while the Bronx site closed in July. Other hip-hop-specialized record shops, like Seattle's Respect and D.C.'s Capital City, shuttered their storefronts late last year, though they continue online. And while circumstances

were different, Peaches Records and Tapes, the New Orleans emporium where Baby discovered Lil Wayne, never re-opened following Hurricane Katrina in August 2005. Three months earlier, Madd Waxx in Durham, N.C., closed—it now offers mail-order products online.

Independently owned, these shops boasted deep hip-hop collections and served as local meccas for networking and crate digging. "DJs and kids who were into music hung out at [these] places after school," says Beatminerz member Mr. Walt, who managed Music Factory in Queens from '87 to '91. But with downloads and file sharing changing the way fans acquire music, nearly 1,100 independent record stores in the U.S. have closed since 2003, according to the Almighty Institute of Music Retail.

Hip-hop shops have been particularly hard hit, as RIAA raids lead many proprietors to stop sell-

ing mixtapes. MP3-mixing software, such as Serato Scratch LIVE, also minimizes the demand for vinyl. "Even DJs are saying, 'Why go to a store and buy records, when I can download at home for free?'" says Shlomy Ben-Moyal, manager of Philadelphia's Armand's Records. With business down over 50 percent in the last two years, Armand's recently sought to sell its entire inventory on eBay.

Despite diminishing sales, mom-and-pop shops, like NYC's Rock and Soul and Fat Beats, plan to continue serving hip-hop addicts. While rap-centric Web sites have provided comparable selection and greater convenience, some think they're no substitute for the record-store experience. "Kids today are happy with a laptop and any Web sites they can download from," says Mr. Walt. "They'll miss out on a big aspect of the game."

Not just the kids. —JESSE SERWER