

MIRACLE ON BAY STREET

How a video store survived the times

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AS STREAMING SERVICES dominate the film industry, more and more video stores are going out of business. This raises the question: does physical media still have a place in the age of streaming?

Bay Street Video opened its doors in 1982 and is one of the few remaining video stores left in Toronto. According to the store's manager, Dwayne Aylward, Bay Street Video is celebrated for "preserving the history of cinema." The store carries a variety of titles for both rent and sale, ranging from silent films to recent Academy-nominated movies.

"The store's very tactile," Aylward says. "You browse around, pick up a product, look at the front, look at the back, and feel the quality of it in your hands. I find that that's appealing to customers. People say they miss that."

Streaming may have indirectly put many video stores out of business, but Aylward says he's seeing a resurgence of customers. In fact, Bay Street Video broke its sales record by an increase of 69 per cent on Boxing Day in 2019.

"I don't know if it's a result of other stores closing, or if people just want to return to video stores because the online terrain of movie-watching is just becoming more convoluted every time they introduce a new streaming service," says Aylward.

Streaming services like Netflix frequently add and remove movies and show titles because of licensing agreements. As production studios plan to launch streaming platforms, the market is becoming more saturated with each new service holding exclusive rights to its content. "You have no control over what streaming companies are offering," says Aylward. "You're at the mercy of what they're willing to let you watch."

Aylward subscribes to Netflix but says he's unhappy with the service because many popular titles just



aren't available. "There's no place you can go online where you can get everything," he says. His customers even complain that some digital versions they pay to own have been removed without notice, so an e-library may not be so reliable either.

"When I buy something, I know I have it. It's mine. It's on my shelf," says Aylward. "When you have a collection in your home, you can look at it and marvel at the quality of it. It's something you've curated yourself. It's a representation of you and it makes you



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look better than you are.”

Buddha Poitras, a film fanatic and loyal customer of Bay Street Video, subscribes to Netflix, Shudder and over 50 movie cable networks. But Poitras says there’s

nothing like shopping at a video store. “Having people to talk to that have the same interests as you, a place where they know everybody’s name, the store is like family to me,” says Poitras.

Poitras has a collection of over 2,400 titles in DVD and Blu-ray format. “There’s a visual satisfaction and pride to seeing something in front of you that you enjoy,” says Poitras. “It’s in our nature to play and feel things. We’ve always been that way. I don’t think that’s ever going to change.” ▲