

METAL MECCA

Rock Fantasy
Middletown, NY

ROCK FANTASY

Hard Rock & Heavy Metal Specialty Shop



BY KEN PIERCE

If you take a quick train ride from Manhattan (New York City) to Middletown, N.Y., you'll be able to visit a true institution in hard rock and heavy metal retail—Rock Fantasy. The shop is a cornucopia of heavy music and memorabilia, and it has been open for business since 1985.

Since the doors first opened for the hungry metal maven, it has seen more than a fair share of genres come and go, but through it all, metal has prevailed. The shop was founded and is operated by Steve Keeler, who aimed Rock Fantasy at being your one-stop shop for all your metal needs.

Browsing the shelves, you'll find the very latest in metal releases from across all of the major providers and be able to choose from black metal to death metal, thrash to folk, as well as the more traditional styles now considered "old school." Luckily for customers, Keeler is one of those shop owners who remains "in the mix" about the genre; if he finds you purchasing something by Therion, there's a good chance that he'll be offering recommendations on similar bands Nightwish and Epica. It makes shopping here a different experience from that of the large chain stores—where Black Eyed Peas are in the rock section, and the staff doesn't know a thing about the bands they're selling. "In the '80s, there were not too many

places to purchase this kind of music and find certain bands," says Keeler on what led him to open the shop originally. "I would often find myself driving over an hour to the oddest places just to get the bands that I liked. I also noticed that concert T-shirts were not too easy to come by, so when I opened the shop, I made sure to have some great ones available. You end up serving both of these needs in the metal fan that way."

The store is not just music and shirts, but also DVDs, the ever-requisite band buttons, patches, posters, pins and one of the largest samplings of used metal and rock CDs for miles. Rock Fantasy offers listeners some long out-of-print music that is often impossible to find. The glass display cases present a



vast collection of buttons, beyond count; and while you might be seeking a memorabilia for one particular band, you are bound to find some others that will surely catch your eye.

Keeler makes a point of hitting many area shows, which gives him a better understanding of the scene and its demographic. Often sponsoring events at The Chance, a local club in nearby Poughkeepsie, NY, he also hosts events for bands in Rock Fantasy. Over the years, his honorary guests have included bands such as Alice In Chains, Overkill, Kreator and Morbid Angel—all who have stopped by to meet fans. Other noted celebrities who have visited his store include professional wrestlers like Jake “The Snake” Roberts, The Monster Abyss, and New Age Outlaws.

Keeler’s extensive background knowledge of music helps him identify the trends when the demand for band shirts shifts from either Dimmu Borgir or Behemoth to something like Trivium or Dragonforce. The best thing about it is that at Rock Fantasy, you can find them all.

“Metal has had some new life breathed into it with networks like Fuse and MTV2 showing more of it on TV, and we also owe some levels of impact based on the quality and quantity of the bands coming over here to tour,” says Keeler on his thoughts on the genre and its future. We found that groups such as Opeth, Cannibal Corpse, Dimmu Borgir and a battery of others form his favorites to listen to and see in concert.

There are always times when a store is barraged with customers, and Rock Fantasy, with its impressive collection, is certainly no different. Well, not to worry—you can pass the waiting time by playing pinball on one of the vintage machines available in the shop. For Kiss fans, don’t miss the pinball machine dedicated to the classic band, or you can always try your luck on the Ted Nugent one right next door.

You don’t have to go all the way to Middletown to have access to this metal megastore because Rock Fantasy also has

an online shop—and should you be looking for anything and can’t make the trek, the staff is more than willing to help you find what you are searching for.

For metalheads in town, don’t miss your opportunity to take a trip to Rock Fantasy.

Rock Fantasy
75 West Main Street
Middletown, NY 10940
845-343-7300
www.rockfantasy.com

