

THE LANTERN

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The Return of Vinyl

Years after the advent of tapes, CDs and MP3s, vinyl sales are making a comeback

Chad Rutan

While some connect to the Web and download their music in minutes, others scour through dusty bins of vinyls to give them another spin.

"I mean, listening to vinyl is great on its own, but it's just as fun to go to the record shop and dig through all the record bins," said Brady O'Callahan, a sophomore in English.

After a period of stagnancy vinyl records are making a comeback, with more and more people opting to buy their music pressed on wax and dig through their closets for their long-lost sides.

According to Nielsen SoundScan, vinyl sales are up 15.4 percent since 2006 while CD sales are down 15 percent. Even Web sites such as Amazon.com and eBay.com have their own vinyl sections, granting LPs an even wider audience.

"CDs are becoming disposable," said Sarah Yetter, an employee at Used Kids Records on High Street. "Listening to vinyl is just more of an experience."

Yetter said people can just throw their CDs around, leave them in their cars or download the files from the Internet. With vinyl, people tend to take more care because LPs are more than just an audio experience. There is an element of responsibility and idiosyncrasy to records.

"We're becoming an MP3 generation and no one cares about a CD," O'Callahan said. "The songs are ripped to computer and then the CD just gathers dust. Vinyl is just way more tangible."

Dan Dow, owner of Used Kids, said the artwork that comes with vinyl is what creates a sense of uniqueness. CDs might come with a leaflet, but vinyls usually carry more artwork and pictures. With newer vinyl presses, sometimes even a purchase code to download the digital album from the Internet is included.

Dow estimates that new and used vinyl records account for about half of all of Used Kids sales, while the other half is new and used CDs and DVDs.

Brad Stickley, a senior in strategic communication, also noticed that wax is on the rise.

Stickley works at Singing Dog Records on Chittenden Avenue and estimates that vinyl accounts for roughly 25 to 50 percent of the shop's sales. Many of those sales are local DJs buying more sides to play at parties and bars, Stickley said.

Many vinyl listeners hold the belief that records create a certain warm, organic sound that electronic files or CDs cannot replicate.

"MP3s can sound like they're being played in a garbage can, you know? A very 'tinny' sound," Yetter said.

Peter Tender, a member of the teaching staff at the Ohio State School of Music, said that all the clicks, pops and scratches people hear on vinyl start to become part of the music for some.

"After listening to the same record for years and years and knowing when a scratch is going to show up, that sometimes becomes expected like a part of the song," Tender said.

Tender said this is caused from dust and debris gathering in the grooves, years of playing, the recording process and sometimes the needle.

"With the needle vibrating in that groove, at a microscopic level, that's a very violent thing going on," he said.

Vinyl records are produced using an analog recording technique, whereas MP3s and CDs are recorded/encoded digitally.

When recording to vinyl, the microphones send an electronic pulse to the machine that cuts the master vinyl plate, off which all other copies are made. The needle in the player then picks up on the grooves cut in the plastic, sending the sound to the speakers.

With digital playback of MP3s or CDs, the computer analyses chunks of the musical data, expanding and compressing them to interpret the sounds for playback. With digital recording, the cracks and pops are easier to eliminate and even prevent. While digital files might sound cleaner, some feel they lack a sense of organic presence.

"It all comes down to a matter of personal preference," Tender said.

Whether they are being spun on a turntable or just hung on a wall, vinyl records are getting a second look and a second go-around.