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## A Resurgence of Vinyl Brings Young and 'Less Young' Collectors Together

By Uma Unni



Acalanes High School sophomore Meghan Wolf shows off her vinyl LP record by Bastille. Photo Uma Unni

Packrats, rejoice! While everyone else on your street started cleaning out their collection of vinyl LP records years ago, you hung on to yours - not out of sentimentality, of course, but out of sheer market shrewdness. You knew that vinyl records would eventually go through a technology resurgence, and that when they became popular again you'd be sorry to have thrown out all your valuable records. Well, the time has come. Pull your vinyls out from the attic and gloat, because vinyl is making a stunning comeback.

The causes behind this resurgence are a subject of controversy. Many see the hipster movement as responsible for vinyl's newfound popularity. The hipster movement, which is a youth movement that emphasizes the pursuit of individual interests and disregard for mainstream popular culture, took an interest in vinyl records in 2008. Since then, this interest has grown to the point where youth shops like Urban Outfitters stock small vinyl collections and sell entry-level turntables in most of their stores. The fact that Urban Outfitters stocks vinyl certainly corroborates the theory that hipsters are the driving force behind vinyl's newfound popularity.

However, older music enthusiasts disagree. Moraga resident Thor Cameron, general manager at Rasputin Records in Berkeley, says "record collecting is a passion that comes in waves." His argument is that vinyl records will continue to draw in members of each generation as a virtue of the medium's richer timbre, which digital music simply cannot replicate. The rich sound draws in a wide range of music lovers. "I have kids who tell me they just got their first turntable for their birthday, some older true believers, and people who got rid of their record collection years ago, and are trying to replace it, up-and-coming mix DJs, etcetera," says Cameron. Meghan Wolf, an Acalanes High School sophomore, is one of these newer vinyl enthusiasts. After being introduced to vinyl by her older sister, Wolf fell in love with the medium. "I like how simple it is," she explains. "There's something about vinyl that just attracts my attention." Wolf denies that she's a hipster-but then again, a central part of the hipster movement is to reject the label "hipster."

As for the hipster movement's involvement in the resurgence of vinyl, Cameron dismisses the idea that they alone can claim credit with a solid "No." He concedes that hipsters are trendy, but argues that if they were truly behind the resurgence of vinyl, "the shine would have faded five years ago," pointing to the hipster movement's tendency to flit from trend to trend without lingering on any one interest for too long. Vinyl's resurgence has continued for nearly seven years now, reaching a peak in 2014, when vinyl sales exceeded the previous year's by 49 percent.

This increased demand is both a blessing and a curse to the aging vinyl industry. While the surge in vinyl sales has kept the last remaining vinyl manufacturers afloat, it also puts a huge strain on the antiquated vinyl manufacturing industry. The last vinyl press was built in 1982, and most of the old presses were stripped for parts years ago, when vinyl appeared to be taking its last breath.

Now, relatively few presses remain, and most are in poor condition after decades of disuse. In addition, the supply of polyvinyl chloride - the raw substance that is pressed into vinyl records - is limited. Over 90 percent of the polyvinyl chloride used in vinyl records is supplied by a single company, Thai Plastic & Chemicals, in Long Beach, Calif. Polyvinyl chloride manufacturers and vinyl presses alike are struggling under the huge burden of music producers who want to move in on the vinyl business again.

The range of music available on vinyl is also increasing. While the classics like The Beatles and The Rolling Stones are naturally present, there are also many new music producers releasing albums on vinyl as well as on iTunes and CD. Alongside Miles Davis and The Beach Boys, vinyl buyers can find Katy Perry, Bruno Mars and Kelly Clarkson.

For those interested in starting or adding to their vinyl collections, a big day in the vinyl world approaches: Record Store Day. On April 18, record shops will offer various titles, including exclusive and limited edition releases that will only be available in physical stores. Artists will also be releasing albums on vinyl as a sort of "first look" for vinyl enthusiasts who take the time to visit a record store on the 18th. Cameron encourages vinyl enthusiasts to stop by Rasputin Records on April 18. "We've got so much planned."

Whether vinyl's resurgence is driven by the hipster movement or an inevitable return to high sound quality, the medium holds irresistible appeal for music lovers of every generation. As Cameron puts it, "Once someone really listens to vinyl, they fall in love with the sound. That's why you see old and new collectors click. It's like an instant community."

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