

“A Vinyl Life”

Helpful Topic – Vinyl Music to his ears

Our writer Darren Springthorpe has a listen to vinyl and turntables.

The long running debate of vinyl over CD and vice versa is a tiresome one. There is no question each format has its pros and cons, some prefer one format over the other and there is certainly nothing right or wrong with that!

The sound of a record is very different from that of CD that's not to say vinyl is better than CD it's just a different format. A different way of listening to your favourite music, and that's what it's all about really, listening to music. A preference to listen to music on vinyl doesn't mean you have to miss out on listening to music just because it isn't on vinyl. Have both formats, I do, and enjoy them equally, but this article is about vinyl records and turntables

Records, if you remember them, then you're already aware of they way they sound. If on the other hand, your only experiences with records are those “Old School” black discs your parents used to listen to then continue reading, there just might be something of interest. News is the joys of vinyl are being rediscovered by a new generation of music fans.

As for me, it all started in 1979 with Pink Floyd's The Wall, listening for the first time hearing the music and little tricky bits the band put into the recording sent shivers. Knowing however that the performance I was getting was limited to the turntable I was using. It steered a path into the music industry, in time turned into an obsession that continues to this day. With many thousands of records and eight, yes 8 turntables later. It would be a reasonable statement to say I have been bitten by the analogue bug.

The almost ritual like process of selecting, cleaning and playing records is by nature part of the vinyl experience. Selecting an album

from the shelves admiring the album cover art, carefully removing the 12 inch glossy black vinyl disc from its sleeve, placing it on the platter, moving the tone arm over the record and placing stylus in the groove, then returning to my favourite chair with a glass of wine is for me relaxation at it's most calming.

Turntables survived the 80's with the release of CD, and have risen like a Phoenix; with Vinyl record sales doubling in 2004. Since the release of CD, digital formats now almost completely drive the consumer entertainment market. HDTV to MP3 players and mobile phones, DVD and the PVR and the list goes on, have all but replaced the analog format. The MP3 era can be traced back to the Compact Disc as it laid the foundation for digitization of the analogue wave form. But all this seemingly inevitable march toward the digital future is not without irony; digital media is unquestionably a more convenient format, however the vinyl record still has a very strong presence in the music reproduction market place.

As no Analogue to Digital conversion is required the original Father sound can be cut directly into the master Die disc, creating the Mother Master record and from the mother the many Sons can be born. These sons are the cutting discs; the albums we purchase are made from. Standard pressings are a good, cheap way to get music on record, as you get more involved with records and want more from your music, half speed mastered and 180gram and 200 gram records are the panicle of vinyl performance. Labels specializing in these records are growing in popularity, however you are unlikely to find such labels in an ordinary music shop, these types of albums are only found in Specialist HIFI dealers and Specialist HIFI record shops as they are generally limited edition pressings and can be quite expensive, but well worth

the cost, as soon as you hear a recording of this nature the cost is very quickly forgotten.

The graph below shows the differences between a records analogue wave form and that of digital wave form of a CD, and then to the digital wave form of DVD Audio, which has a higher sampling rate than standard CD.

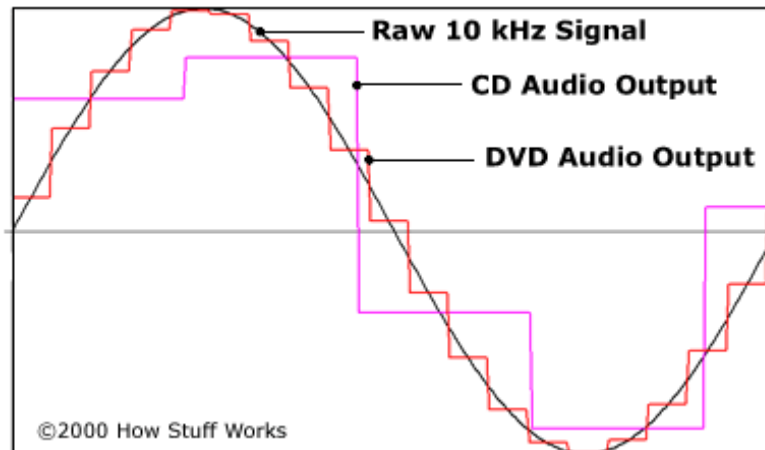
The LP is nearly 60; sonic fidelity is why this analog technology has maintained a devoted niche market in this digital age. Of course, you'll need a turntable to sample the glories of analog sound. Whether, you're just interested in dipping your toe into the vinyl pool for the first time, or itching to unleash that old collection of records boxed and all but forgotten in the basement, or maybe a vinyl aficionado, looking to upgrade your aging turntable, a well balanced modern turntable suiting you're needs is sure to get you spinning.

The Turntable Basics

Turntables are, by design mechanical in nature. In fact, the turntable has only two tasks, to turn the record at a precise speed and reduce any and all mechanical noise, to allow the cartridge (needle) to collect and convert the sound information on the record.

There are two types of turntables; Direct Drive and Belt Drive. Both require a motor and drive system, Platter assembly and Tone Arm assembly. However a vital ingredient is the phono cartridge. The plinth holds the motor and drive system, the platter assemblies and supports the tone arm, which in turn holds the phono cartridge. The Phono cartridge houses the stylus (needle) that traces the LP's groove and converts mechanical vibrations into an electrical output signal. Cartridges are ULTRA sensitive vibration detectors, and they can't distinguish between the music on the LP and any noise or vibrations that are generated by the turntable's motor, platter or tone arm bearings or for that matter the sound filling your room. The vibrations of the stylus in the

record groove are at nearly microscopic levels, so precision is essential. Exterior vibration can destroy the critical relationship of the tone arm, cartridge and record, so audiophile turntables are grounded by extremely solid foundations to absorb exterior



vibrations caused by feedback from speakers, people walking, cars driving by and even planes passing overhead.

Higher-end turntables provide superior isolation from those noises, and collect more of the sound of the record itself. It's the same deal with the tone arm and cartridge; the best turntable systems dramatically reduce the apparent mechanical noise.

Clicks and pops associated with vinyl records are more often than not due to microscopic grit and static build up in the groove of the record. Use of an antistatic system and careful cleaning of the vinyl reduces even more noise making the listening experience even more enjoyable.

Possibly the most famous of all is the Linn, Sondek LP12 (\$11,000, fully loaded) the LP12 has held a reigning position in turntables since 1972, the platter bearing is the key mechanical component, Consistent and accurate timing of turntable revolutions and, thus, the ability to reproduce music with pitch accuracy are essential to faithful sound reproduction. The Sondek has gone through more than 20 upgrades in its 30-year life, ranging from improved power supplies and bearing housings to baseboard redesign.

Fortunately, you don't have to spend five figures to get a quality turntable. Keep in mind

the lower the mechanical noise from the turntable the better the performance also remember the phono cartridge will also make a huge difference the key is to keep balance of performance. To get the best results avoid fully automatic operation, fully manual turntables are significantly quieter

Do yourself a favor, listen to some records. Then you decide weather the vinyl format is for you. The turntable may not sell in great numbers but it will continue to thrive in niche markets. For as long as people want them, they'll be there.

For me the turntable is king of the reproduction heap.

Thank you for taking the time to read this article, happy listening.

Darren Springthorpe

AudioTrends Showroom

10 Argent Place, Ringwood, VIC 3134

Phone 9874 8233

Hours: Mon - Thurs 10am to 5.30pm
Fri 10am to 7pm, Sat 10am to 4pm



