

# VINYL REVIVAL

## FACT

According to *NME* and *Record Collector* magazine, the UK's most sought-after vinyl is 1958's *That'll Be The Day/In Spite Of All The Danger* by The Quarrymen (who's members went on to form The Beatles).

In the first half of 2015, vinyl sales in the UK increased 56 per cent on the same period in 2014. This year, sales are expected to break the two million mark – accounting for almost ten per cent of music sales.

**David Taylor** investigates what's behind the titanic resurgence of the humble record

“The four building blocks of the universe are fire, water, gravel and vinyl.” Pulitzer Prize-winning author Dave Barry might have been exaggerating, but for a rapidly growing number of people, his sentiment rings true. The first quarter of 2015 saw sales rise 69 per cent compared to the same period in 2014, which had already seen record-breaking sales of more than nine million. The trend looks set to continue in 2016.

Why has there been such resurgence in the medium? Tim Bown, former editor of *HiFi Choice* magazine, believes it comes down to vinyl representing an alternative: “It’s that enduring concept of underground culture and the ‘cool kids’ backlash. Digital music – streaming and downloads – is now the mainstream, and it’s here to stay.

“Vinyl is seen as authentic and real; it’s all about the grooves on Side A and Side B, putting a needle on a record and getting lost in the music. Vinyl is now the niche, not the norm; it’s alternative, part of the counter-culture.”

The musical warmth of vinyl is another appeal. Ricardo Franassovici is founder

and chairman of Absolute Sounds, the UK’s leading importer and distributor of high-performance audio equipment. The “remarkable” upturn in vinyl sales is, he says, down to the unique lure of its sound: “The sound quality has an enduring magic – melodic and enchanting, imperfect but just so fluid and dynamic, devoid of digital ‘noise’. Vinyl sounds organic; it simply engages the listener with the music, despite its imperfections.”

For experts like Ricardo, this doesn’t mean that the audio quality isn’t high-end: “It’s all about precision engineering – the mass of the platter, the pressure exerted on the bearing, the smoothness of the motor, the stability of the platter’s revolutions, isolation from external vibrations and so on. Manufacturers such as Continuum, EAT and TechDAS have continually refined techniques and technologies to ensure vinyl sounds better now than at any time in the past.”

Michael Fremer is a globally renowned music journalist and authority on all things vinyl, and has been on a “quixotic crusade”



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⊙ to defend the format throughout its wilderness years from his base in New York City. He agrees wholeheartedly: “When properly manufactured and played back, records produce the most satisfying sound. When you consider that you’re essentially dragging a tiny stone through a vinyl canyon, that anything comes through the speakers is miraculous.

“Yes, there are occasional sonic flaws, but if that’s what you concentrate on, you’d better not visit the symphony because the audience is usually old and they are constantly coughing and clearing their throats. You listen past all of that because of the compelling musical presentation.”

Talk to any vinyl enthusiast and the same look will cross their eyes, the same feeling of high romance that comes from any deep connection. Ricardo puts this down to the tactile experience with each play of a record: “There is a ritual to removing vinyl from its sleeve and placing it on a turntable, like taking a cigar out of the humidor and lighting it up, or decanting a fine wine before pouring it into a glass, experiencing the bouquet and tasting.

“It may lack the convenience of digital, of course, but vinyl’s physical, authentic appeal gives it a point of difference for passionate music fans.”

Vinyl is here to stay. It has become the choice of a generation yearning to reconnect with authenticity, after a digital revolution that has left us all a little cold. How the tables have turned. ⊙

## WHERE TO BUY VINYL

The best spots in London to rekindle your romance with records.



### SISTER RAY RECORDS

With a huge selection of mainstream and underground choices at both its flagship Soho store and newer Shoreditch store, within Ace Hotel, Sister Ray should probably be the first stop on your journey into vinyl. The Soho store is featured on the cover art of Oasis classic (*What’s the Story? Morning Glory*, after all. *75 Berwick Street, Soho, W1F*

### HONEST JON’S

Established in 1974, Honest Jon’s has become a must for any record addict in the capital. Its main focus is on reggae, folk, soul/ funk, jazz and world music, but you can get just about anything and the store ships worldwide. No excuse not to experience a living legend in London vinyl. *278 Portobello Road, Ladbroke Grove, W10*

### FLASHBACK RECORDS

A sleek collection of stores with an old-school approach, its website has more than 12,000 titles, but only covers half of the overall stock. The three London locations house a wide range of genres on new and second-hand vinyl, CD and DVDs. There are regular events, with in-store gigs and an artist-in-residence at the Shoreditch branch. *Flagship store: 50 Essex Road, Islington, N1*

### ROUGH TRADE EAST

The East End branch of the Rough Trade Empire is a brewery conversion that sells as many CDs as Vinyl records, along with a good selection of books. Every item has a written description, to encourage a personal discovery of music. There’s a café at the front, and the stage inside has hosted gigs by bands such as Blur and Queens of the Stone Age. *Old Truman Brewery, 91 Brick Lane, E1*

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### FROM TOP

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EAT Forte S, from £5,300,

[europeanaudioteam.com](http://europeanaudioteam.com)

TechDAS Air Force One, £69,980,

[techdas.jp](http://techdas.jp)

Continuum Caliburn, £180,000,

[continuumaudiolabs.com](http://continuumaudiolabs.com)