

For the record, the vinyl scene is back in Fort Collins

Back in the late 1980s, Mike Fogerty, a man with a friendly smile and kind eyes, managed a small vinyl shop called Sunshine Records on East Colfax Avenue in downtown Denver. The store's collection featured early hip-hop like N.W.A and Snoop Dogg. Its patrons were often members of rival Crips and Bloods gang members, making Mike's manager gig dangerous at times.

Mike's favorite memory of the store was the day Ice Cube came in to sign copies of N.W.A's new record *Straight Outta Compton*. Members of both gangs lined up outside to meet the rapper. Police swarmed the shop intending to shut it down, only agreeing to let the event continue if the members stopped wearing their colors. Mike nervously went to inform his customers of the police's demand, and to his surprise, they obliged. "I went out and told them and everybody, ya know, bandanas and everything came off. Because all they cared about was getting an autograph from Ice Cube."

Mike's story is a prime example of how music can bring people together – even rival gangs like the Bloods and Crips. In those days, records were on the out and CDs were beginning to flood stores, but now, vinyl is back. In December of 2017, global data company Nielsen released its year-end music report revealing that vinyl sales were experiencing an immense amount of sales growth, accounting for 14% of physical album sales in the United States. Statista, a statistics database, had similar findings in their 2018 article "The Surprising Comeback of Vinyl Records," discovering that vinyl sales have increased by 1,000% in the last ten years. It is particularly hot in music hubs like Fort Collins, where you can find at least five record stores by simply typing 'vinyl' into Google Maps.

Mike is one of the many record store owners to take advantage of the vinyl resurgence in Fort Collins, crediting the spike to the town's variety of music venues, such as the Aggie Theatre or Hodi's Half Note Collins. Along with his wife, Tory, he opened All Sales Vinyl in Old Town back in September, filling the hole that Bisetti's Italian Restaurant left behind. Tory says she is happy with the store's success so far, and I can see why. During our interview, Tory stopped to help a variety of customers, ranging from an older man perusing through jazz records, to a college student buying a Pink Floyd poster. "The posters are a big hit. Visuals are a really big part of the vinyl experience," she said, referencing the stunning album art that adorns each poster and record case.

The Fogertys' diverse customer base reminds me of his Ice Cube story. Although an age difference is hardly as serious as gang rivalry, the concept is still the same: vinyl brings people together, regardless of who they are.

Fewer can attest to this unity than Jason Heller, a Colorado-based funk DJ who only spins vinyl at his concerts: "People have a lot of love for vinyl...the ability to actually show someone your collection of music and share it with them. It's such a different experience than being on your laptop."

Vinyl and danceable music don't always blend seamlessly, however; the dancing at Jason's concerts often knocks his needles right off the records. This causes a brief panic as the music starts to skip, but Jason enjoys the challenge. He says blips like this add a level of authenticity to his performance that digital music cannot match. "I wouldn't go so far as to call it athletic, but there's this extra level of performance and interaction that goes on with records," he

said. “It’s kinda cool knowing your whole experience is dependent on the DJ physically making sure the needle stays on the record.”

There is a level of trust between Jason and his audience that the imperfections of vinyl create. His audience depends on him to keep the records spinning, while he depends on them to enjoy the authenticity of the vinyl. This trust is not exclusive to live performance – shopping for records requires a bit of trust as well. Unlike music streaming platforms like Spotify, which suggest songs tailored to your taste, record stores require you to sift through obscure albums and singles in the hopes that you will find the right one. It’s a bit of a gamble. For Karl (last name withheld), the bespectacled, flannel-wearing employee at Bizarre Bazaar records on College Avenue, this gamble is what makes vinyl so special: “It’s like a treasure hunt every time you come in here...you just have to come in with low expectations and see what you can find.”

Karl said his fascination with vinyl began in the fifth grade when he stole a copy of *Rolling Stone* magazine featuring the “500 Greatest Albums of All Time.” Since then, he has made it his mission to obtain every album from that list on vinyl. When I asked him why he decided on vinyl, when digital mp3s would have been much easier to gather, he cited the tangibility of the medium. “It’s always nice to own a physical copy of something,” he said. “The physicality and the packaging of vinyl is nice and better than CDs.”

His response reminded me of Tory’s comment about how important visuals are to the vinyl experience. Perhaps visuals, along with the physical album, are the reasons for the renewed popularity of vinyl in a world where digital music is available with the click of a button. Steve Harms, owner of Harms Labs, a small but impressive audio repair shop in Old Town Square, certainly thinks so.

“A computer file isn’t the same as feeling the album jacket. You can look at the liner notes and see who produced it,” he said, pausing to think of some of his favorite records. “I like pulling out my Joe Walsh album, hearing all the clicks and pops, and knowing it’s my version of it.” Steve began collecting vinyl in 1966, and has been working with record players intimately since he opened up shop in Fort Collins in 1974. He has seen vinyl wax and wane in popularity numerous times over the years, and if anyone has a clue as to why the vinyl scene is making a comeback in Fort Collins, it’s him.

He attributes its revitalized success to a number of factors, including sound. While Steve can appreciate the audio quality of digital music, he believes that vinyl truly does have a superior sound due to its limited dynamic range. This limited range means that anything mastered on vinyl can’t be cranked up to very high volumes – it maxes out around 60 decibels (a CD can climb up to 100 decibels). This may seem like a disadvantage, but because the quiet sounds on vinyl cannot be jacked up as loud as they can be on CDs, there is a greater volume difference that can be heard when listening to vinyl. As Steve best put it: “CDs are like McDonald’s. They’re always going to sound the same, just like my burger is always going to taste bad.”

Along with better sound, Steve thinks the holistic experience of vinyl – the covers, the liner notes, the sense of ownership – will keep it around for years to come. Mike, who is actually a longtime friend of Steve’s, agrees. So much so, in fact, that he fashioned the mission for All Sales Vinyl in this vein, which reads: “Providing a music fan experience for your ears, eyes and heart.”

When I asked Mike how he and Tory came up with this mission, he flashed me that warm smile and began to speak with an infectious passion: “The album artwork, that’s eyes. You’re

listening to stuff, ears. Being moved gets you in the heart. All of this music...it's in your heart.

The more you listen, it just becomes part of you. You can't break free."

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Karl - did not want to give me contact info, but he works at Bizarre Bazaar on Monday's at 12
(Alex and Jane , who also work at that time, were helpful too, although their interviews ultimately
didn't fit into the final product)

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