

# Collectormania

By Lisa Wheeler

## Hopelessly devoted to Olivia Newton-John

John Ingram can vividly tell you the exact moment when he first discovered Olivia Newton-John. "It was 1977. I was in the third grade and on my way to school, when one morning my mom had stopped into a 7-11 to get milk. At the front of the store was a magazine rack, with one magazine, *Super Teen*, opened to a full-page, full-color photo of Olivia. I asked my mom to buy the magazine for me. I was 8 at the time."

On Christmas morning, in 1973, Michael Prince's family proceeded to open their presents. He wasn't exactly ungrateful for his holiday haul, but there was one gift in particular that he preferred over his own. "My sister got an Olivia Newton-John album, *If Not For You*, for Christmas, and I loved it and I adopted it and played it over and over." The impressionable 9-year-old immediately wanted to know more about the singer. "After school, my bus stop was in front of a drug store so I would go in every day to look at all the magazines for pictures of Olivia," he said. "I didn't care if it was a picture the size of a dime — I had to have it. In fact, when I was young, I would sit in front of the television and take pictures of her on the screen."

But while it would be quick to simply chalk up the appreciation for the singer as nothing more than a temporary grade schoolboy crush, as grown men, Prince and Ingram continue to have an admiration for the singer. "It was a culmination of her beauty, her talent, her music and her movie appearances. I was just hooked," admitted Ingram. "I can say now, after nearly 30 years of collecting and following her career, that my dedication stems from the respect I have for her and her dedication in whatever she chooses to do. In the '70s she boycotted Japan, refusing to tour because of the senseless slaughtering of dolphins. She has helped raise awareness for environmental issues, childhood cancer and breast cancer awareness. I don't mean to make her sound like a saint, but in my opinion, she is the closest thing."

And that devotion is further evident when you step into the fans' homes. Both men have spent almost a lifetime compiling some of the largest collections known of Olivia Newton-John memorabilia. Prince's collection is so massive, it has taken over the living space of his Florida house. "I literally have an Olivia Newton-John museum in my home. I can't even begin to tell you

how much money I've spent on Olivia. I'm sure I could have bought another house with all of the money I have spent," he said. "I have so much it is falling out of my drawers. My front living room is covered from floor to ceiling with posters, gold and platinum records. Olivia is in every room of the house — even the bathroom." Prince counts 275 posters, hundreds of recordings, in every possible format, as well as movies, sheet music and life-size stand-ups in his collection. "If she is on anything, I have to have it."

Ingram, a Fort Worth-based graphic designer, originally started collecting what he called "a hodge-podge mixture of clippings, magazines, pin-ups, records, posters and videos" of the artist, but after more than a decade of trying to find everything he could featuring Olivia Newton-John, "It was getting larger than I could possibly manage," he said. He finally decided to focus solely on posters, compact discs and videos.

"This is still a huge undertaking in itself. With an artist whose career has spanned nearly 40 years, there is a lot of stuff out there." Housing his collection has also proved a task. He decided early on that he would keep it all in his home, dedicating a substantial amount of square footage to his ever-growing poster collection. "I don't think I could deal with the thought of it being locked up in a warehouse," he said. "After my father died in 1995, my mother moved back in with me. In discussing my Olivia collection with others, she always says, 'The only places in the house that Olivia doesn't occupy are the bathroom and the kitchen.' I have thought of ways to incorporate Olivia into the bathroom and kitchen, but none have seemed to happen as of yet. We'll see." Having his collection nearby might allow him to keep a watchful eye on it, but it does present an interesting scenario in the event of an emergency. "I have always wondered if, God forbid, there was a fire or some other catastrophic event, what would I grab first and try to save? I don't think my arms are large enough to grab everything, and it would probably be best to just go down with the ship."

Although it proves as little comfort, in a total loss, he has, at least, catalogued a portion of his impressive collection on his own Web site, *Wall to Wall*, <http://home.flash.net/~j Ingram>. "I temporarily let the Web site go, and it hasn't been updated for a few

years because my collection has gotten so big that even I was having trouble keeping up with it," he said. He is currently redesigning the site, at a new location, <http://webpages.charter.net/jeingram>.

Although Ingram keeps his collection close to home, there is one piece of the singer that goes with him wherever he goes — his Olivia Newton-John tattoo. "I had always wanted a tattoo but didn't want to go for something cheesy," he said. So he had the letters O-N-J tattooed on his arm. "Her 1985 album *Soul Kiss* had the logo on the cover, and I thought to myself that it was simple and discreet. I decided that this is what I wanted. I have had people ask me what it meant and have had to point out the O-N-J. People that have known me for years have always known what it stands for."

So with a multitude of items in their combined collections, even they admit there is one piece eluding them. "One thing I am missing, that I would love to have, is the 12-inch *Xanadu* picture disc [an estimated 30-50 are known to exist]," said Ingram. "It came up on eBay several years ago, and my final bid was \$1,050. I believe it went for something like \$1,100. Boy, was I upset."

Fans of the singer have often commented on not only how accessible she is, but also how much she appreciates their dedication. But while Prince has had his own wonderful memories visiting with his favorite performer, on numerous occasions, there was one encounter that even he would probably like to forget.

"It was at the Sundance Film Festival. I had met with her probably six times in one year. I walked up to her, and she said, 'Hello Michael.' I almost fell over that she remembered me. So at the end of the movie I walked out with her. Olivia would always ask where I found a certain photo or poster that I would ask her to sign. Well, this particular time she hadn't seen a certain CD or something that I asked her to sign, and I said, 'I bet there is a lot of junk you have never seen.' Junk! I said that to Olivia. Thankfully, I think she didn't hear me, because she didn't seem upset."

Family members, and even former co-workers, are well aware of the affection both men have for "Lovely Livy."

"I worked for Gloria Estefan for 5 1/2 years, and she was always supportive of my friendliness and fanaticism for Olivia,"

Courtesy of Lisa Wheeler



John Ingram

said Prince. "I told Gloria, 'Olivia is first and you are second,' but that's a whole 'nother story."

Prince's partner of eight years knew he was getting a package deal by having a relationship with a someone who had such an affection for the singer. But Olivia Newton-John isn't the only special lady in Prince's life, and on one occasion, both women were able to meet.

"[My partner and I] took our mothers to an event [the Children's Health and Environmental Coalition — Newton-John is the national spokesperson] in California, where we introduced our mothers to Olivia. The event is always in May, and I would go see Olivia for Mother's Day, instead of my mom, so that year we took our mothers," said Prince.

Ingram's recollection of that event also includes his mother. "While a friend and I were on our way to the restroom, Olivia walked out. He walked in and left me standing outside with Olivia. She asked how I was, to which I replied, 'Great, but my mom is upset with me.' She asked, 'Why?,' and I explained that I had missed my mom's birthday in January to see her at an Australia Day event in Los Angeles, and that this weekend was Mother's Day, and again I was in Los Angeles because of her. She looked through her purse because she wanted to send my mom a note, and I pulled out my *Totally Hot* poster for her to sign. On it she wrote, 'Dear Juanita, your son feels so bad that he missed Mother's Day. Happy Mother's Day! Love, Olivia Newton-John.' To this day me and my mom both have joint custody of this poster."

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So are you an uber collector? Are you a collector with one of, if not, the largest collections documented of a certain band or artist? Is your collecting taking over your home? Contact me, via my Web site, [www.isleofwrite.com](http://www.isleofwrite.com), or at Lisa Wheeler, P.O. Box 27633, Austin Texas 78755.