

Collectormania!

TALKIN' BOUT MY (YOUNGER) GENERATION VINYL COLLECTOR

by Lisa Wheeler

Sasha Smith sifted through a large moving box of albums at the spring Austin Record Convention, intently analyzing each disc for any flaws.

"You see this? It doesn't look like a big scratch, but it would definitely skip," she said, holding a copy of The Rolling Stones' *Some Girls*, an album older than father.

"She liked to listen to my records when she was a baby," said her 26-year-old dad, Ethan. "She's 6 now, and I guess she still enjoys them."

For anyone concerned about future appreciation of vinyl, fate appears to be firmly in the grasp of a younger generation, poised to carry on with an equal, if not greater interest, once reserved for seasoned (older) enthusiasts. In this instant (audio) gratification age of MP3s and portable players, more and more young music aficionados are embracing what is too often believed an obsolete format and are becoming vinyl devotees. It's a trend so great that it's caught the attention of the academic world, including David Hayes, who, at the Ontario Institute For Studies In Education, recently completed his three-year, 298-page doctorate dissertation on the topic, which he titled *Making Music Meaningful — Youth Investment In Popular Music*.

"Parents are definitely a source for locating LPs," he said. "While some youth stated that their parents steered them toward certain artists and recordings, most tracked down LPs based on references in interviews with contemporary artists."

"At first he wanted to collect because I was. Now, it's his very own obsession," said 33-year-old Brandon Jason Reeb, an avid Aerosmith collector, of his 11-year-old son, Brandon Jacob. "He loved all the cool albums and artwork that I was getting and started begging for some for himself. After his first few albums, he was hooked."

The younger Reeb's first record, which he got at the tender age of 7, was Queen's *Jazz*, but he quickly absorbed his father's appreciation for Steven Tyler and company.

"Mainly my collection consists of Aerosmith stuff," he said, "but I have a few things from Iron Maiden, Queen, and Van Halen."

So what is it about vinyl that draws teens to appreciate and actively search for it? In the 23 interviews he conducted with teens aged 14-19, Dr. Hayes discovered that younger collectors overwhelmingly insist the sound quality of LPs is superior to digital formats.

"For them, it's a higher degree of sonic fidelity, but even I had to question that, given the types of home stereos most played their records on."

Hayes' research, detailed in the February 2006 issue of *Popular Music And Society*, found that teen-age record collectors were also drawn to albums by the larger cover artwork, as compared to a condensed representation on an compact disc, and the one-on-one responsibility involved with enjoying the media.

"The preference young people have for vinyl is based on the fact that many feel a stronger degree of personal agency in the listening experience, due to the physicality of positioning an LP on the turntable, carefully cuing the stylus, cleaning the LP and putting it away."

But as with any teen trend, there is a certain sense of

rebellion involved, namely against the corporate control of music formats from the recording industry.

"I certainly think that this attitude figures into the investments that music fans make, not only in *what* they listen to, but *how* they listen to music as well," said Hayes. "In the case of young vinyl enthusiasts, I argue that the very idea that they're listening to music via a technology that is virtually the antithesis of their peers' preferred forms (i.e. CD and MP3 players) is part of the charm. In short, skepticism toward the music industry, its artists and the modes by which their music is produced, distributed and consumed has led many youth to search for an experience that is somehow separate from dominant popular culture," Hayes continued.

"My friends have seen my collection when they visit, and I also talk about it at school.... Some of my friends have started to collect vinyl since we met."

— 12-year-old record collector Erin Farrar

Although a majority of those interviewed for his thesis enjoyed the vinyl format, few considered themselves collectors.

"Some accepted the identity of 'collector' while others rejected it. Perhaps a response to popular perceptions of collectors as characters who look like the comic book store owner in *The Simpsons*," he said. "However, even the self-diagnosed collectors were adamant that it was still about the music and not the collection as an entity."

"My friends know about my collection, but they don't say much," said Brandon Jacob Reeb. "They just listen to music but don't care much about the neat artwork and album covers. One of my friends said it all sounded very cool when I told him about it. Most of my friends really don't show much interest in music other than listening to it. I think that's too bad, because it's a lot of fun and really neat."

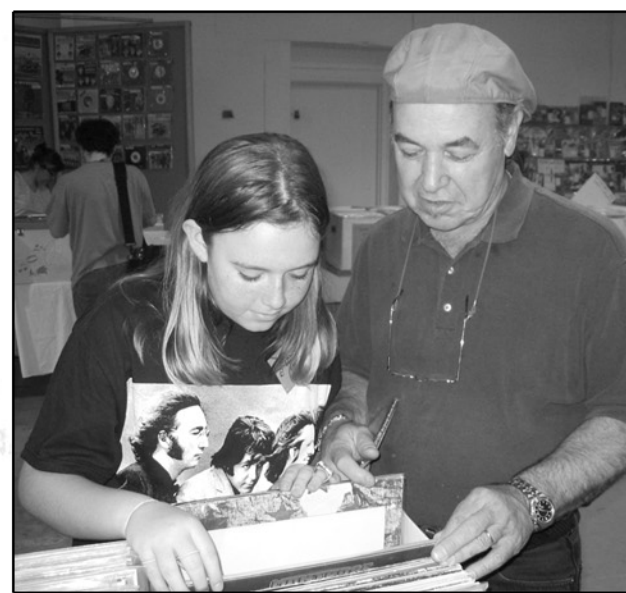
Twelve-year-old Erin Farrar is one who *does* consider herself a collector.

"My friends have seen my collection when they visit, and I also talk about it at school," said the San Antonio resident. "They think that it's cool. Before they met me, some of them had never seen a record album. Some of my friends have started to collect vinyl since we met."

A fan of The Beatles, she owes her interests to her father, 57-year-old Matt.

"Her mom, Cassie, and I are happy to see her enjoy herself, and what's not to enjoy if music is part of it?" As a music retailer [Aardwolf Collects], he has seen a more youthful appreciation for vinyl in his clientele recently. "As an active store owner, I am always amazed at the number of young people who are actively buying vinyl records, whether it's the newest groups or the old greats. Of course, there are times when the question comes, 'How do you play these big black CDs?' I just smile and show them the turntable."

So what is the best way to introduce your love of col-



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Erin Farrar and her father, Matt, search for goodies at the Austin Record Convention.

lecting to the next generation? Parents interviewed said first and foremost it is important have music accessible in your home. Bring out your albums (yes, even the ones you handle with kid gloves) and play them, and consider purchasing the kids their own turntable. Invite

them to go with you on vinyl-hunting excursions. Instilling an appreciation for used record shops, thrift stores and garage sales at an early age will allow them to enjoy the thrill of the hunt (and the art of bartering).

"While you are there, find a band that they like there and

start from there," said Brandon Jason Reeb. "When you get a child an old LP with a fold-out cover, some great artwork and a poster inside, it's awesome to watch the appreciation spread across their face."

As was evident at the spring Austin Record Convention, more and more children are accompanying their parents to the big show. Introduce them to dealers and fellow collectors, and teach them what to look for with your next purchase.

"Let them find that magic for themselves. Tell them why *you* like it and how special it will all be to them someday. Just make it fun — that's what music is all about! It's the sound of life," Reeb explained.

Without a doubt, adult influence is imperative to keeping the love of vinyl alive with a younger audience. "I've always tried to instill in him the importance of music, of the appreciation for it," said Reeb. "I remember loving music as a kid and [I] feel like I've carried all that love with me as I've grown up. When I play old records for him and see him liking it, I know that that music will continue to be heard in years to come. I'm a nostalgic kind of guy, and I think it's important to hold onto things like this. It's nice to see that same level of appreciation in the next generation. And, if I can be any kind of influence to keeping that tradition going, then I would be very proud indeed."

Coming up: How many picture-disc enthusiasts are familiar with the origin of their collections? You may be surprised to know that a majority of the most coveted pieces can be traced back to a southern California man whom few (if any) people have ever heard of. We'll introduce you not only to his story, but also to his family members who want collectors to be aware of his contribution.

Comments? Suggestions for a story topic? You can reach me at Collectormania@isleofwrite.com, or via the good ol' post office at Lisa Wheeler, Box 27633, Austin, TX 78755.