

REVIEW:

Amoeba Music

An indie music shop thriving in the time of Spotify.



Alamy

Reviewed by [MEGAN MCCREA](#)

Let's start with scale. Where are we between global flagship and neighborhood boutique?

Think of Amoeba Music as the mascot of Haight-Ashbury, San Francisco's famously countercultural neighborhood and the epicenter of the Summer of Love. Born in 1997—the same year as Radiohead's *OK Computer* and the Notorious B.I.G.'s *Life After Death*—Amoeba is colorful and eclectic, a riot of color and sound. An independent music shop thriving in the age of Spotify and Amazon, the whole place has a punky, free-spirited vibe: The walls are papered with band posters,

cheeky merch abounds (Iron Maiden bobbleheads, Bob Ross action figures, a Nicolas Cage prayer candle), and the staff deejays, playing ear-catching CDs of their choice from bands you may have never heard before.

What can we find here, or what should we look for?

Walking into Amoeba, what strikes you first is the sheer abundance. In its former life, this building was a bowling alley; now, every iota of space houses something—shelves of 45s, glass cases lined with rare cassette tapes, racks of Amoeba T-shirts. There's even an entire room devoted to DVDs, VHSes, and laserdiscs. But above all, Amoeba specializes in vinyl. They carry albums of all stripes—from hip-hop to house, jazz to gospel, with a collection of rock albums it could take a full day to peruse.

If money's no object, what goes in the cart?

Because Amoeba buys and sells records, the stock is always in flux (sort of like, um, an amoeba). That said, the store is never short on splurge-worthy treats. Look up on the walls, where the staff display hot-ticket items, and you might find a rarity, say, the original pressing of your favorite Radiohead album, or a promo poster from Jimi Hendrix's BBC Sessions. And if you don't have a high-quality turntable on which to play The Bends? Amoeba stocks top-line specimens, with all the requisite tech to give you clean, clear, concert-perfect sound.

And ... what if we're on a budget?

To find the deals, check the bargain sections in the DVD, CD, and vinyl areas of the store—recognizable by the groups of excited customers, flipping through stacks with single-minded determination. Spend time browsing, and you'll be handsomely rewarded with, say a Rolling Stones CD for \$1, and an entire season's worth of Upstairs, Downstairs for \$3.

Who else shops here?

The shopper beside you might be a long-haired alternative kid with a skateboard under their arm, a sleek woman in a peacoat with a nattily-dressed dog, or a guy who's seriously channeling George Michael. Whoever is beside you, they will be absorbed in their quest, to find something interesting, something beautiful, something that speaks to them.

Any secret tips, or “don’t go home without” purchases?

The sea of vinyl here is exciting but, also, kind of intimidating. Don’t know where to start? Turn to the music-loving staff. They publish a (free) seasonal guidebook on “music we like,” and they’re happy to field questions. Seek out the shelves of staff-recommended CDs and vinyl, some of which even feature lovingly hand-scrawled notes pithily summing up the album. A sample: “Like a Model T idling on a Nascar track.”