

Household Music - Finding My Own Groove

By Emily Pecot

“There’s a step stool there if you need it,” said the bespectacled vinyl vendor, mercifully. I stood on my tippy toes with much strain, wishing I was a few inches taller to reach the crates in the back, the floral tote bag on my shoulder already heavy with more WFMU Record Fair finds than I’d budgeted for. I also wished for better dexterity as I could tell the smug hipster next to me was waiting for me to leaf through the offerings faster, further adding to my strain as I was shaking from the thrill of the find, a hot flash coming on.

My first year at the fair, I felt like an amateur, convinced I didn’t know what I was doing. I was too aimless to belong there, wandering through the aisles unsure of what I was looking for, or whether I should be looking for something specific at all.

I wasn’t new to exploring music, but I was new to exploring it on vinyl. Unlike streaming, buying records forced me to consider who I was and decide how I wanted to adorn my life.

During my married years, I often deferred to my ex to curate our household music. I stunted my own music exploration by believing his depth of knowledge and snobbery, I mean critique, surpassed my own emotional connections to music.

After disentanglement and years of confidence-building I discovered this joy for myself and now I make my vinyl collection whatever I want it to be.

In my old life, picking vinyl was a pastime I tagged along for, not one I actively participated in. It was both intriguing and intimidating. What if I irreparably scratched it, or just looked at it the wrong way?

I flipped through some records here and there, feeling lost in the wilderness, while he did the “serious” vinyl picking.

I later realized I could make it whatever I wanted. I could embrace the mystery and intrigue.

“Oh yes, I recognize one of those names, I bet this one will be good,” I say to myself.

“Ooooo, groovy album art!”

“Oh my god I LOVE this album and it MUST be mine!”

“This one could be lousy, but it’s cheap enough to give it a spin!”

As a single woman in a sea of smug music dudes, growing a vinyl collection feels particularly renegade. It takes confidence in my instinct to say, “Yes, I will spend money on this big old piece of media to take up space in my cute apartment and hope it sounds good.”

Over time, I’ve cultivated my taste and learned how to be a good steward of these relics, even if freshly minted. There’s a sacredness to being able to hold sound.

One of my happiest memories was sitting on the floor behind my credenza, proudly hooking up *my* new turntable, then lying down and listening to *my* records, hearing *my* feelings.

My soul comes alive when I hear a record, it moves me. I feel closer than I’ll ever be to being there when the music happened, whether in the studio or the crowd.

Some may be skeptical of the format, seeing it as tedious or inferior. Flipping the album halfway through has its drawbacks. Scratches are annoying. Everything takes up space.

But I love the space it takes up! I love the ritual. Even the sound of dust going round and round has its own appeal – a reminder of its tactility.

I love the richness of the sound, the way it prompts you to listen actively, and the comfort of having “a thing” that is one’s own, not under the purview of faceless tech bros who could yank our music collections out from under us.

Oh, hell no – you fuckers can’t take my records!

In a fickle and disposable world, nothing shows love like a friend showing up on my doorstep with a thoughtfully chosen vinyl gift for me to hold, see, and enjoy whenever I want for as long as I want.

Now, I think nothing of shamelessly kneeling on a dirty thrift store floor, flipping past worn copies of ubiquitously discarded albums like “Whipped Cream & Other Delights,” hoping to find something amazing.

I always have a folded-up bag in case I come across potential treasures.

I chat up the vendors and bargain with a smile.

And to the Record Fair guy with the helpful step stool, I’ll see you again this fall!