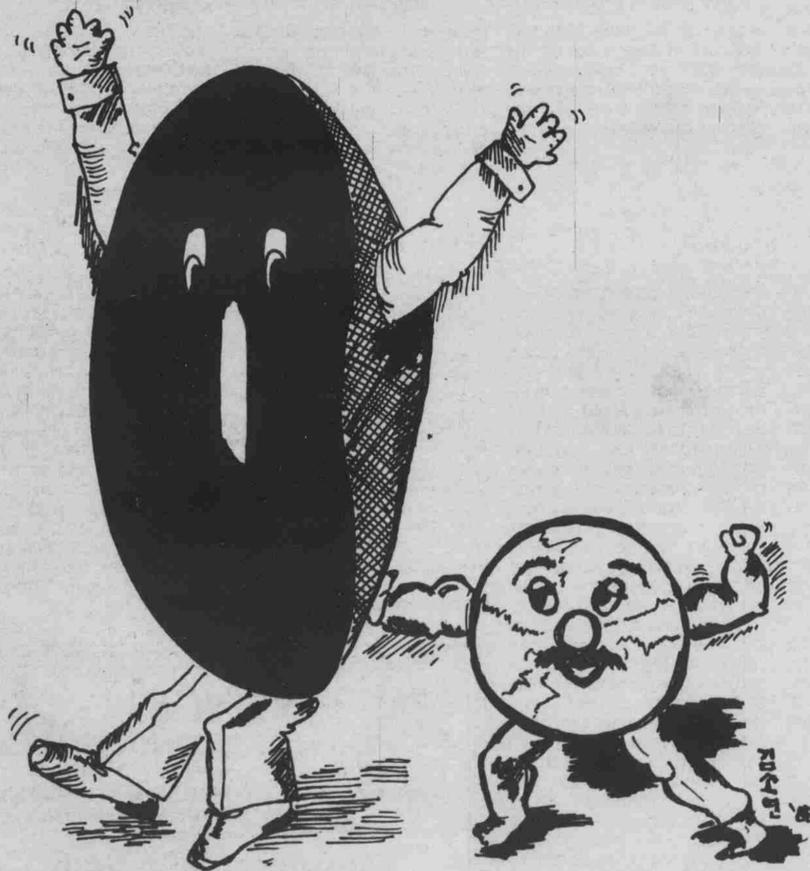
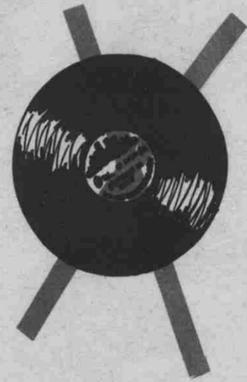


# Technology over tradition:

## The dueling discs — Will the tiny CD eventually vanquish the outdated LP?



Oh noooooo!! It seems like albums are getting more and more difficult to find these days. Will CDs push albums out of our lives forever? In some areas the new technology has made these tough times for vinyl discs but some experts contend that our vinyl friends still have a significant life expectancy.

By LESLEY BARTLETT  
Staff Writer

Remember the day when you saved your allowance to buy a Barry Manilow album, and then ran home to play it on the combination turntable/eight-track tape player? Even if your musical taste was more sophisticated, the equipment you used to play the album was still probably the same. Now, just as eight-track tapes have become virtually nonexistent, albums are slowly disappearing.

Statistics prove that sales of albums (LPs) are indeed down in mainstream record stores. At Record Bar in University Mall, LPs constitute only six percent of the sales (in number, not in dollars), and they account for 10 to 12 percent of the stock. Meanwhile, CDs constitute 28 percent and cassettes 50 percent of the sales.

According to Jenny Frye, manager of the University Mall Record Bar, the drop in sales stems from the decrease in demand and not to any lack of supply. The policy of Record Bar is to use a date code pull in which employees remove from the shelf any products which have not sold after six or eight months. Thus the store ensures that it provides any product which has a market. According to results of the pull, the LP obviously lacks this market.

But not all stores report such a drastic decline in sales. At School Kids Records on Franklin Street, LPs, CDs and cassettes each account for approximately one-third of all sales (again, in number) and 35 percent of stock. While retailers at School Kids have noticed a decline in LP sales, they say it has been slight.

Other stores that sell used records support this claim. Nice Price Books has experienced no lack of demand. Neither has Skylight Exchange, where LPs constitute 60 percent of sales. Dennis Gavin, manager of Skylight Exchange, notes, '70s and '80s rock barely sells on LPs, but new releases and '60s rock sell very quickly.

So the question remains: Is the LP dying out? Research suggests that sales of older rock and of reggae, jazz and classical LPs are indeed down. Enthusiasts of these music types seem to have converted to the higher quality CD or the more accessible cassette. However, the figures of stock vs. sales imply a correlation between availability and demand; people buy LPs in stores where they feel confident of finding their selection, and they shy away from stores known to maintain a low LP supply.

LP faithfuls argue the advantages of the LP, one of which is liner notes. The main benefit, though, is cover art. Often the art loses its original impact when shrunk to CD and cassette size.

Phil Cowan of Back Door Records cites the work

of Roger Dean, who has designed many album covers, as being immortal. Glenn Boothe, a disc jockey at WXYC, lists the cover of Michelle Shocked's *Short, Sharp, Shocked* as one of his favorites. The cover is an actual photograph of Shocked being arrested as she protested at the Democratic National Convention in 1984. LP supporters also point to the Beatles' cover for *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* and the Doors' *LA Woman* as examples of those that did not survive the reduction in size for the CD.

Another advantage to the LP is that CDs do not offer the same breadth in title as LPs do. For example, Barry Blanchette of Nice Price Books explained that often collectors want a specific performance of a classical piece. If they cannot find it on CD, they purchase it on an album.

A few small record labels that deal mainly in underground rock, such as Shimmy Disc Records out of New York, print their material only on LP because they cannot afford the CD technology.

Some cite disadvantages of the CD as advantages for the LP. Audiophiles accuse CD sound and packaging of being "cold." Also, more people own turntables than CD players. Afraid to purchase a CD player since DATs (digital audio tapes) may be released soon and could eventually replace CDs, they tenaciously hang on to their turntables. These facts indicate that there is still a market for LPs.

Finally, some LP fans are unhappy that the CD often contains cuts that were not originally released on the LP and the cassette. "Extra cuts on the CD are often just a promotional trick of the manufacturer trying to sell the product, regardless of the artist's original intention," Gavin said. "It is denigrating to the art."

Conversely, CD enthusiasts argue that often the extra cuts were intended by the artist to be a part of the album. Bob Walton of radio station WRDU said, "usually the extra cuts were originally a part of the album but were cut due to the lack of room on the LP."

In this case, the CD provides the necessary space for artists to include all the cuts they wish.

The LP has more strikes against it. At the simplest level the CD delivers higher quality sound, and the cassette provides more versatility than the LP, since you can play the cassette in a car stereo or in a mobile Walkman.

In addition, the attitude of record companies toward LPs is detrimental to their survival. Most new products are released on LP as well as CD and cassette; Steve Bennett, vice president of marketing for Record Bar, said, "LP business... is almost a new-release business."

However, many re-issues of old recordings are released only on CD or cassette. In addition, record companies offer disincentives on LPs, according to Paul Fusseol of the Record Bar warehouse in Durham. With the disincentive it costs stores more to return LPs than it does to return CDs or cassettes.

Also, discounts are offered for the purchase of the cassette or the CD whereas no discount is extended for the purchase of LPs. Frye supports this claim. "Record companies are trying to phase LPs out and are speeding up the process," she says.

Replacement needles for turntables and the turntables themselves are getting more scarce as well, discouraging turntable (and therefore LP) use. Many stores no longer even carry needles. Brendle's reports it is getting fewer shipments of turntables and more of CD players.

The trend in most audio retail stores entails phasing out lower quality turntables and stocking the higher quality ones. Jeff Nelson of Stereo Sound said that in the high quality turntables, sales have actually increased due to audiophiles who prefer the warmth of the LP as opposed to the CD. Unfortunately, getting a turntable adequate to milk the LP to its full potential is too expensive for the majority of music lovers.

In addition, according to Rolling Stone magazine, the cost of CDs is falling as technology spreads and competition forces prices down. Meanwhile, the LP cost is rising because manufacturers must ensure that they do not suffer the loss in profit on the LP.

Most radio stations have converted their collection from LP to CD format. Walton said WRDU plays CDs due to the better sound quality but still uses the LPs that are sent from record companies as giveaways. Does the station use albums at all anymore? Sure they do. "... as door-stops, ashtrays, Frisbees..." Walton says.

College radio stations still employ the LP format mainly because companies often will not send them material in CD form. However, even UNC's own WXYC is expecting a new CD player in a few weeks. Although the station will still use LPs, it will begin to incorporate CDs into its collection.

Various predictions for the LP abound. Walton argued that the LP is dying out and that it should. Howard Appelbaum, the vice president of a chain of D.C. record stores, predicted that LPs will vanish within three years. But some enthusiasts remain faithful.

As Blanchette says, "until technology is much more widespread, (LPs) won't fade away. Until that last country music lover switches to CDs, LPs will be around."



How albums are used at WRDU:  
"as Frisbees, ashtrays, doorstops..."  
—Bob Walton, music director.

## Rebel! Don't give up all of your precious LPs — Recycle them!

By JENNY LIVINGSTON  
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So they say the LP is obsolete.

The CDs are coming, they say, to wipe vinyl clean off the shelves of your friendly neighborhood record store.

No matter that most CDs cost 16 bucks a pop. No matter that they skip worse than most records. No matter that this whole thing smacks of the worst kind of conspiracy.

You guessed it, it's a YUPPIE conspiracy designed to force us vinyl-lovers into the closet, away from respectable people who have two BMWs in the garage and two and a half kids in day care, away from real music and into the clutches of (God forbid) NEW AGE yuppie music. Could it get worse?

Personally, I don't think the public is ready to give up their treasured LPs. It's not just the vinyl we'd miss, it's the liner notes, it's the great cover art, it's the loving ritual of cleaning each record before playing it, handling it just so and then sliding it ever so gently back into its cover.

But just in case the conspiracy succeeds, we're going to have to be prepared for an albumless world in which turntables are no more common than 18-year-old virgins. What will we do with all those albums when the last turntable has expired and no one even

knows how to fix it? What will we do when our kids look at our collections and ask what those funny black things are?

What are we going to do with all that vinyl?  
■ Frisbees — They look a little like them, they'll even fly like them if you throw them hard enough; just don't throw them to your dog. For extra laughs, you could sharpen the edge, throw them at your enemies and pretend you're Chuck Norris.

■ retro dinnerware — what could be more trendy? Ditch that china bullstuff and dish out some vittles on your handy round albums. Use 45s for salad plates. Use your turntable as a revolving buffet. Best of all, they're now DISPOSABLE.

■ decoration — You know, mobiles, wall-coverings, sculpture. The circle is a very aesthetically pleasing form.

■ recycling — If worse comes to worse, you could always just melt them down. Just think how much vinyl we'd recover from those useless LPs. There would be enough to cover all the furniture in Hardees for the next 100 years, enough to make hundreds of thousands more "Leather Look" luggage sets for them to sell on the home shopping channels.

It's enough to make you puke, huh?