

diversions

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Historical Record

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As technology has developed, it has dictated what the music industry is capable of.

Vinyl gave way to tape, which gave way to compact discs and then mini ones.

But in the age of iPods and downloading, what does the album, both physically and conceptually, mean?

The album as an evolving form is nothing new. In 1967 The Beatles released *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* and forever changed the idea of what an album could be.

Sgt. Pepper's is considered to be the first concept album, where the songs bleed into one another under the banner of Sgt. Pepper's Band. Henceforth, the album no longer would be just a collection of songs. The music now had the power to be greater than the sum of its parts.

Rock operas emerged, which are defined by a theme or plot and overlapping songs established by The Beatles.

In 1969 The Who's *Tommy*, a rock opera about a deaf, dumb and blind pinball wizard, granted the band international recognition and made it to Broadway in 1993 as a musical.

Pink Floyd's rock opera *The Wall*, released in 1979, tells the tale of a rocker named Pink. The record added a new dimension to the changing album format when it was made into a film in 1982.

But technological advances have influenced music and how it is experienced.

A music fanatic in the '60s would put a vinyl LP on the turntable and experience the diversity within the music as well as the interconnectivity between the tracks.

Listeners today can hit shuffle on their iTunes and hear "When I'm Sixty-Four" sandwiched between "Thriller" and "Baby Got Back."

Since 2000 CD sales have continued to fall while downloading of entire albums or individual tracks continues to rise.

Bands are forced to focus on marketing innovations more than music, in an attempt to increase album sales.

For some live recordings have worked to combat the bootleg market and illegal downloading.

Dave Matthews Band fought the bootleg industry in the late '90s, shutting down stores and labels that sold unauthorized recordings of the band's shows. In 1997 DMB released *Live at Red Rocks 8.15.95*. The band's reputation for onstage musical improvisation makes live recordings mar-

ketable and sought-after albums for fans.

For more studio-oriented artists the focus has been less on sound and more on look.

Packaging for CDs has taken on a new life, including more than just a pullout of the lyrics. For example, Beck's latest albums have been anything but the standard disc-and-cover-art format.

The album *Guero* was leaked as an unfinished mix in 2004, then released in 2005 with additional tracks. It is available in a CD/DVD version with bonus tracks and interactive video art. Beck also released *GueroLito*, a companion piece with remixes by artists such as Diplo and Adrock.

His latest album, *The Information*, is equipped with stickers and a blank cover so fans can create their own, original album art. There are also plans to release a video version that will be available through YouTube. But can Beck's inventive approach increase sales and reinstate an interest in albums themselves?

Maria Albani, co-manager of Schoolkids Records, isn't convinced.

"Honestly, I haven't heard any feedback from customers about Beck's new album," Albani said.

"I've been telling customers what the stickers are for. They think the album just comes with Beck stickers and don't know they are for designing the cover."

Schoolkids Records carries albums that include DualDisc technology, exclusive artwork, never-before-seen photos and other features the listener will not get from simply downloading.

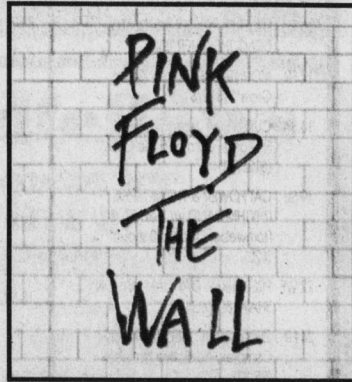
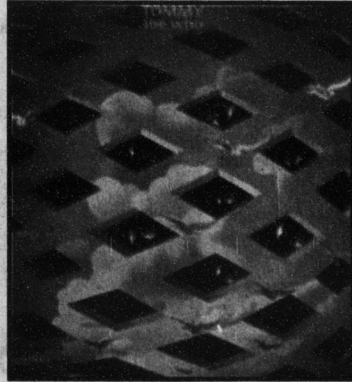
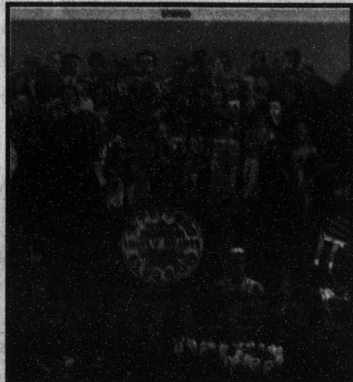
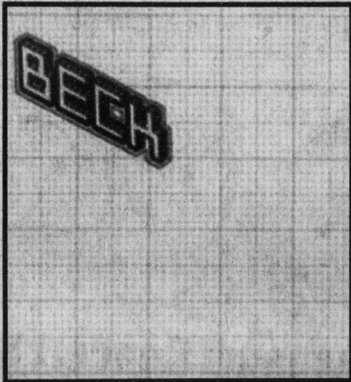
"If you are a hard-core fan and you have to have everything, I think the bonus material is appealing," Albani said.

Durham-based Merge Records runs many promotions for CDs with benefits for those who buy the album. For example, they might offer bonus discs to the first 100 buyers or to those who preorder albums.

But the company has not done any rereleases with bonus material, regional press representative Christina Rentz said.

The rereleasing of albums, Rentz said, is unfair to fans who purchased the music

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