

1999

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Recommended Citation

Curtiss, Miles W. (1999) "Buying Used Records," *Amaranthus*: Vol. 1999: Iss. 1, Article 14.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/amaranthus/vol1999/iss1/14>

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Buying Used Records

Miles W. Curtiss

As much as I complain about the ill effects of commerce on our society, I must admit I have a soft spot for certain aspects of it. The oddest side effect of our programmed drive to constantly buy is a certain loss of shopping. Of course, people still buy things all the time, but we don't really shop anymore. We don't entertain that wonderful ritual of walking into a store with no real buying agenda, spending hours circling the same corners of the shop until we come across some secret gem that we never would've thought to discover on our own: we've lost the ability to search for treasures.

Shopping for music is the greatest form of this activity. It strips away all of the stress that comes with shopping for necessity items and allows you to focus on finding something that truly accents all that is you. Shopping in used record stores is an even greater thrill as far as I'm concerned. Stores that only carry new records seem to have a kind of over sanitized way about them, the lights are always too bright, and the subtle reflection of that light coming off of a thousand shrink-wrapped CD's and cassettes magnifies that white hospital glow to an almost eerie proportion. Not only that, but when you buy a brand new record, it has no sense of history. You know that this record has never lived before and you are completely aware of the fact that, in most ways, it is merely a product waiting to be validated by your consumption of it. For the purchase of a new record to be truly valuable, the record itself must be almost unrealistically amazing to be worth the extra money you pay.

The very buildings that used records are sold in have a soul that resonates throughout every corner of the structure. How can they avoid it with the daily hustle and movement of the thousands of various recording that stopped a while in such places? The shelves are seeded with quirky and unpredictable creatures waiting to jump out and startle you. Most of all, used record have lives and histories that you will never know. If you're lucky, you may get some cryptic hint at the worlds these creatures have traveled through, but that's all. As you scan the racks, you can see lonely EP's spurned by their former masters and classic records whose owners were probably just too philistine to appreciate.

Shopping for used record also gives you a finer sense of things like timing, fate, and destiny, than is possible in most corners of modern life. You are always surrounded by stories of a friend of a friend finding a copy of Sonic Youth's *Daydream Nation* on vinyl for only six dollars, or finding a rare Brian Auger & The Trinity 7" on Monday, coming back Tuesday with money in hand, only to find that the elusive treasure is gone. In my junior year of high school I purchased a copy of *Foolish* by Superchunk and a week later I became friends with a girl who was a giant Superchunk fan. Months into our relationship, she told me of how a ex-friend of hers had stolen and sold her copy of *Foolish* out of spite...only a few days before I bought my copy of the record. Now, after my friendship with the

girl has faded away, I still own a copy of one of her favorite records that might've once been hers. That cassette has more value to me because of that than it ever would've had I bought it new.

A few years ago, I was given a stockpile of rare and prominent punk/new wave records. Amongst the collection were several records by a band called Ultravox. While I still think their first record is exceptional and exciting, I found most of their later ones to be annoying and unlistenable. I even went as far as to dump one of those records on an obscure fire escape on OSU campus, because I couldn't even stand to be around it. The very next day I was telling one of my friends about it when the most beautiful woman I will ever see in my life came over to me because she had overheard me mention the band's name. She proceeded to ask me if I had a record with certain song on it. This song happened to be the first one on the record I had gotten rid of. I stood dumbfounded, deer-in-headlights style. Needless to say, I've never discarded a single record since then.

Over Thanksgiving break, I decided to check out a store called Goldmine Records. I'd never been to it before, but I'd heard many stories about the place living up to its name. I entered the store, and strolled through its sea of retro vinyl and rare Beatles 7i. After skimming over the store's one-dollar vinyl section, then I worked my way back to the latter half of the alphabet in the main section. I saw several James Taylor records that attracted me and moved over to the U's, where a U2 live album stood out ready to challenge the world. I then began combing through the rest of the U's looking for anything else of interest, when I came across a certain Ultravox record I used to know. The records sleeve was a bit dirty, like it had been left outside to fight the weather for a night and I knew that this was not just a record that I had not seen in several years, but it was also quite possibly the very copy that I had not seen in years.

I bought the record and went about the rest of my visiting. I carried the LP with me as a kind of reminder that no story really ends; we just lose track of it somewhere over a horizon that's too broad to know. When I had disposed of that record nearly five years ago, I was happy to think that I would never see it again. But when the cashier at the record store gave me my change I thought to myself of how much he'd been ripped off by only charging me two dollars.