

# Perils Of Record Collecting

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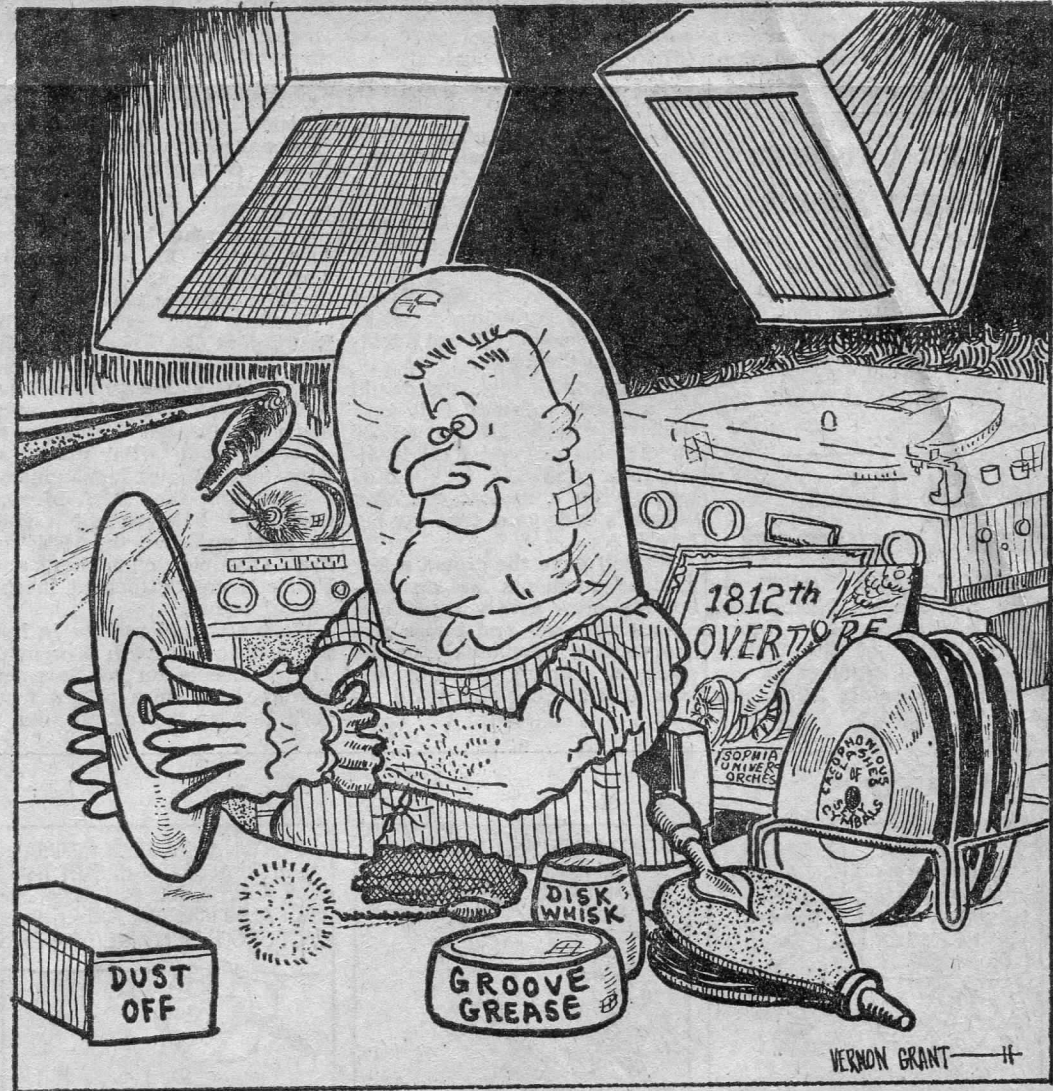
Some people take care of their records. Some don't.

You can always tell the ones who don't. Their record player is usually a 15-year-old monaural wreck. The tone arm has two or three coins taped to it to keep the needle in the groove. The records these people own are scattered about in piles on the floor, caked with grime and dust. Yet, when the records are played on the equipment (or what's more annoying, even on high-class equipment), there's no problems with high fidelity, surface noise and so forth—the albums sound just fine.

Then there's the people that do care. They spend thousands of dollars on the most sophisticated stereo equipment which reproduces every possible unmusical noise (scratches, ticks, pops, zips, thuds, hisses, clicks) to be extracted from record grooves. They take surgical care of their records, wearing white gloves, spending countless sums of money on sprays, brushes, cleaners, as well as bills for recurring ulcers. Their records slowly deteriorate until they sound as if they were pressed on budge gravel. I'm a member of this latter group. Friends and I have been known to compare similar records on the basis of scratches rather than the music they contain.

Actually, considering the high precision involved in manufacturing records, it's lucky that any arrive in the stores in playing condition at all. With up to 30 minutes of music squeezed into an 8 cm radius per side of disc, the grooves on the average are .008 cm wide, which is pretty small.

Defects produced in a record before it reaches the consumer can be placed in two main categories: warpage, due to improper pressing or storage, and various types of surface noise and related defects. The best way to deal with either of these problems is a quick trip back to the record shop. This process can become frustrating, however, when the whole pressing is defective. I knew one person who went back no less than 10 times to get a satisfactory pressing of a pop record. And once at the store, there's always the problem of trying to convince the salesclerk that the record is defective, and not your fault. This is further complicated if the store is



more interested in selling records than customer relations. It's strictly a live and learn experience.

Then once the customer has a record in satisfactory shape and his turntable has a non-blunted needle set at the correct (and preferably light) stylus tracking weight, there are yet more problems to be overcome.

Like the air, for example. Most houses are hardly pollution-free, aside from smoggy air which seeps in from outside. There are odors from cooking and smoking, all of which contain small particles of harmful substances, as well as ordinary dust and a variety of microbial and other small creatures.

So records should be stored away, not only in their jackets, but within an inner sleeve in the jacket made of soft paper or plastic-lined paper. The record player turntable should have a dust cover. And records should be handled only by the center label and outer edges. Sweat from fingertips is laced with corrosive substances that attack vinyl. Warpage at home can be avoided by storing the records horizontally or vertically, preferably in a cabinet of some

type, and away from any sources of heat (like sunlight, which is murder).

There are a wide variety of record care products on the market. The sprays found in many stores I'd trust about as far as I could throw Fujiyama. (One woman I know cleaned her records with a spray used for polishing furniture.) Also a dubious investment are the soft "anti-static" cloths. If used too long, they transfer the dust and gunk they wipe off records back on to them.

The cleaners which have soft brushes on a long arm which is mounted on the turntable deck are more appealing, provided they don't cause a noticeable change in the speed of the record. My favorite device of this type is the Dust Bug, produced by the English firm of Cecil E. Watts, which markets a wide variety of safe and dependable cleaners. Also spoken of highly is the American-made discwasher, which, like the Watts products, leaves no residue on the albums and reduces the electrostatic charge built up on them.

Aside from acquiring either increased tolerance or the ability to suffer, there's little that can be done once a

record is scratched—except buy a new one. Dust can often be eliminated by washing (yes, washing) the disc in a luke-warm solution of water containing a small amount of mild detergent, then rinsing it under the running cold tap, and letting it dry on some soft (tissue) paper.

Of course, for the frustrated anti-scratch fanatic, there's always the possibility of tapes. But then, aside from a limited selection of music, there are a host of hazards: accidental erasure due to exposure to magnetic fields, possibility of breakage, print-through (when tightly wound and left for a long time, the sound from one layer of the tape may be transferred on to the next), deterioration of the tape itself...

## In Mirthland

"Why did you turn off the TV?" demanded the older brother.

"I want to go out to the kitchen and get some cookies," said the 4-year-old, "and I didn't want to miss anything."