

Vinyl collecting alive in Lincoln as popularity rises

by Helen Howard

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Madison Husmann looks through the used vinyl section at First Day Vinyl, a record store located in South Lincoln.

by Helen Howard / KRNU / Nebraska News Service

Passion for music and its format fuels the decision to purchase and sell music physically everyday.

A MusicWatch study in March 2022 estimated that 18 million consumers age 13 and older purchased a vinyl record, which is a 27% increase from 2020. Billboard concluded that 47.1% of album sales in the U.S. were vinyl record sales. Fifty-seven percent of physical albums were sold on vinyl and outsold their competing formats.

“The best part of vinyl records is that it's real. It's a physical piece of music that I can relate to, that I can use to express myself and how I'm feeling or who I am as a person,” said Alex Neill, a broadcasting and sports media major at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, who has amassed a collection of over 300 records.

Despite the popularity of vinyl rising currently, Lincoln has seen vinyl record stores come and go through the years. Sometimes these stores morphed and evolved into other stores. In 1983, Dirt Cheap Records became Twisters. The Omaha-based record store, Homer's Music, purchased both Twisters and Pickle Records, another independent record store in Lincoln, in 1994. Homer's Music closed its final Lincoln location in 2007, marking the end of an era of physical record stores in the city.

This hasn't stopped stores like First Day Vinyl from emerging. Travis Mannschreck, one of the store's co-owners, remembered the days of visiting Lincoln's record stores fondly.

“As soon as I could drive a car at 16, I spent most of my time driving from Syracuse to Homer's and Twisters and just spending any available money that I had at the time,” Mannschreck said.

Mannschreck opened First Day Vinyl in December 2022. The store, located in South Lincoln, sells new and used vinyl, cassettes, CDs and other music memorabilia and merchandise. The store also holds listening parties for newly released albums and hosts shows for local bands.

“The reason I opened the store was to give high school and college kids a place where they could have the same experience that I had growing up. There are other stores in town, obviously, but I wanted a bigger store that you kind of come in and hang out at rather than just kind of a small where you go and flip through albums and then you're done,” Mannschreck said.

In 2023, the business brought in \$420,000 in sales. Seventy-seven percent of sales are attributed to new records and 11% are used records, while the remaining 12% in sales are merchandise items like turntables, posters and band t-shirts.



At the front of the store, First Day Vinyl displays its Top 20 Best Sellers section, one of the store's most popular sections.

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First Day Vinyl's customer base skews younger according to Mannschreck, but maintaining and growing clientele requires diversity in inventory, but also knowing what will sell.

“We have a top 20 section here which we spend a lot of time on, just kind of looking at like what's selling because that's how we're gonna keep our doors open. But I also want to have a nice diverse selection of stuff that might not

sell a ton of copies every week but still have enough variety that people will want to continue to come in,” Mannschreck said.

Les Greer owned and operated Lefty's Records in Lincoln for 11 years before retiring in September 2022 and placing the store into new owners' hands. The role required adaption and keeping albums in stock that would appeal to both younger and older audiences, despite differences in expectations from these different groups.

“Ordering new music is tricky. It's not an exact science. I noticed more young people buying new vinyl in later years. Older customers thought new vinyl was too expensive but actually is the same price they were paying in the 70's and 80's when you consider inflation. I brought in more stuff like Taylor Swift and Billie Eilish. Certain classic rock titles like The Beatles and Nirvana always sold as new reissues,” Greer said.

This divide is something Mannschreck echoes, but it doesn't deter younger shoppers from purchasing brand-new albums on vinyl.

“There's a generational gap. Baby boomers are used to paying less than 10 bucks a record, and they're kind of stuck to that, so they can find that in the used section. Pulling the trigger on a \$30 or \$40 record is something they're not really willing to do. But kids never had that experience of cheap records, so they don't really bat an eye at paying more for a new record,” Mannschreck said.

Tom Larson, a professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Glenn Korff School of Music and an audio engineer, started collecting singles as a teenager while his parents collected full-length albums.

"Coinciding with the rise of The Beatles, vinyl albums became the primary source of music content. You were kind of judged by what albums you had. You sat down and listened to the music and looked at the album cover and read the liner notes. It was a very sort of communal experience, but it was so important," Larson said.

This experience is something consumers of physical media are still searching for. Madison Husmann is a recent graduate from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln who has spent her first few months of post-graduate life working part-time at First Day Vinyl.

"I started collecting vinyl when I was 11 or 12 with my grandpa and all of his old records. Vinyl is a different way to experience music listening because you have to make more of an effort to kind of go pick up the record. I just feel like that art form is so beautiful. The physical form makes me focus on what I'm listening to a lot more. I'm paying attention and catching these little things that I wouldn't notice elsewhere," Husmann said.

Larson attributed the resurgence in vinyl to the idea of music ownership, which wasn't always a priority for music listeners.

"When mp3s were first popular, people didn't feel like they needed to own all of the music. I think it's interesting that the idea of owning music again and having that collection is really important," said Larson.

Sam Spethman, a political science and communications major at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln from Lincoln, collects albums from artists like Lana Del Rey, Beyoncé and Madonna. He talked about the idea of the fragility of streaming platforms.

"If one day there's nothing on streaming, I would like to have some sort of ownership and idea of what I used to listen to in case those methods don't exist. I always look at CDs and vinyls at thrift stores. And if I'm like, 'I know this album,' I could just have it in my car for a road trip or when my phone's dead in my car. It feels like having the ability to listen to music without my phone," said Spethman.



Sam Spethman shuffles through his vinyl collection, including albums from Lana Del Rey and Madonna.

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Another aspect of the changing habits of music listeners is the idea of convenience.

“When we got to that point where you could carry music around with you, the whole communal experience started to go away. With the resurgence of vinyl in the last few vinyl records have outsold CDs. Hopefully, that whole communal experience will come back to some degree,” said

Larson.

According to MusicWatch’s study, 95% of consumers who purchase vinyl records are expected to purchase more records and become repeat customers. Polvinyl, a European vinyl pressing plant, predicts a \$1.27 billion growth in sales between 2023 and 2030.

While these trend forecasts could be proven true, Larson has seen these sales fluctuate throughout the years.

“Nostalgia is always an important driver of marketplaces. Maybe that's part of vinyl’s resurgence. I kind of suspect that it might be a trend, but I certainly hope it isn't,” Larson said.

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