

Dusty Groove Will Revive A Chicago Jazz DJ Tradition At Its Free 20th Birthday Party

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Photo via [Facebook](#)

West Town's [Dusty Groove](#) (1120 N. Ashland Ave.) turns 20 this year, and to celebrate, the store is throwing itself an epic, free birthday party on July 16. The party will be more like a block party than a street fest, owner Rick Wojcik, 49, told Chicagoist. Nothing will be for sale; instead, as a thank you to Dusty Groove's loyal customers, everything will be free, from the historic DJ sets to the record giveaways to the (non-alcoholic) ginger beer bar hosted by Maria's Packaged Goods and Community Bar. Overall, it'll be sort of like how Lakeview's The Alley [threw itself a funeral](#)? But more fun, less hearse-y.

It's a given, at Dusty Groove, that the music will be the main attraction—even when it's up against free food. One of the [best record stores](#) in [Chicago](#) and [the whole dang country](#), Dusty Groove began as a web-only affair back in 1996. Since then, founders Wojcik and JP Schauer—who started the store while DJing at University of Chicago's WHPK radio station—have taken it all the way to brick-and-mortar store status. First, Dusty Groove occupied a back-alley room in Hyde Park (with no front door!). Then, it moved to a Wicker Park store, and finally, in 2001, it reached the West Town storefront it's still thriving in today.

The store has succeeded in spite of competition from streaming services, Wojcik said, because it both embraces technology (see: the online store) and Chicago's history as a hub for jazz, soul and hip-hop (see: the actual record collection). The owners' connection with local history shows especially in their DJ lineup for the block party: eight to ten Chicago DJs, many of them pushing 70. Led by Al Carter-Bey, a Cabrini-Green native, the DJs were all part of a jazz DJ scene in the '60s and '70s on 51st Street.

"It's not a hip-hop DJ thing where they're mixing it all up," Wojcik explained. (The 51st Street scene was largely a precursor to hip-hop and Jamaican sound system, he said.) Instead, the DJs battled head to head in what were termed "cutting contests" by playing sets of back-to-back songs, hewing to strict guidelines about how many vocal performances, drum solos and the like were allowed.

"It was a really creative reuse of records," Wojcik said.

These battles aren't well-documented—according to Wojcik, even the Jazz Institute of Chicago doesn't have record of them. But Wojcik wants to preserve the memory of the cutting contests, and they'll be revived, at least for an afternoon, at the Dusty Groove party.



Photo via [Facebook](#)

As for the food and drink situation: "It's not a massive kegger," Wojcik said. But it won't be completely dry, either; Revolution Brewery is making a donation to the festivities. Other participating institutions will include Dark Matter Coffee, Antique Taco, Scone City and Dove's Luncheonette. Kimski, Bridgeport's new Polish fusion restaurant that just opened next door to Maria's, will donate food, too—as will Dusty Groove. "We'll... be grilling ourselves," Wojcik said.

Partygoers will also have a chance to play a smattering of carnival games, win records in giveaways, and watch a 2 p.m. performance from Meridian Trio—a "pretty well-known avant jazz group" in Wojcik's estimation—in [Corbett vs. Dempsey](#), the art gallery on the third floor of Dusty Groove's building. It's all one big thank you to Dusty Groove's Chicago base.

"Right now, Chicago is maybe one of the best cities in the world for record stores," Wojcik said, and he would know—as a traveler, he's bought and sold records all over the world, but he's kept his home base here.

[Dusty Groove's 20th anniversary party](#) will run from noon to 5 p.m. on July 16. [Read more about how Dusty Groove is celebrating its 20th anniversary here.](#)

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