



PICK N' PULL: 18 BEST RECORD STORES IN AMERICA

POSTED IN ENTERTAINMENT BY MIKE WALDRON

Ask any music fanatic circa mid-2000s regarding the relevance of vinyl and they most likely would have scoffed at the notion of a revival. It was a bad time for independent record stores. Mom n' Pop shops were locking up left and right for the last time as listeners continued to migrate away from analog in favor of digital. File sharing replaced trading and bartering, and we began to witness the onslaught of online piracy. Today, this almost feels like a horrific dystopia straight out of an audiophile's nightmare. However, it wasn't all that long ago. Napster, founded in 1999, set the stage for our transference to file sharing in the world of music, enabling a myriad of music files to be downloaded free of charge, anywhere, anytime. This was shortly followed by the likes of Kazaa and Limewire that took seeding and downloading music a step further still. Flash forward to 2006, and vinyl sales had hit their lowest point in history with a mere \$36 million in sales.

So what happened? Just this past year vinyl sales topped \$418 million, more than ten-fold of what was garnered just nine years earlier. The uptick began in 2007 with the sales of each surpassing year increasing ever so slightly. However, it was the installment of Record Store Day, first initiated in 2008, that set the stages for such massive growth. The "holiday" successfully brought buyers back into the incense-infused, cardboard clogged neighborhood brick and mortar record stores. It was at this moment that contemporary artists – from both independent labels and those on Billboard's Top 40 list – began releasing their albums on wax. Now, the likes of Adele are found under the same roof as Abbey Road, leading to an ever-expanding and diverse consumer demographic.

Of course, your neighborhood record store owner can't complain. They're adapting as well within this so-called "vinyl revival," where record stores around the nation continue to take on duties that surpass their previous responsibilities as the local music sherpa. They're hosting live performances, partnering with coffee houses and restaurants, even going as far as hosting the artists themselves for special debut releases and signings. It's an exciting time to be a music fan no doubt, you just have to know where to look.

Naturally, we're here to help. Pooling resources and experiences to bring you the best of the best. This list was no different, though we do feel it's worth mentioning that there are thousands of candidates that could have made it on this list of the 18 best record stores in the US. We simply picked several staple locations, based on diversity, offerings, and history, to shed light on the growing vinyl industry without overwhelming our readers with a list of 200. No, instead, raising awareness is the name of the game here, peppered with a handful of must-sees whenever your thirst for new music transcends a YouTube search. Happy listening.



PHOTO: WATERLOO RECORDS

WATERLOO RECORDS

Location: Austin, TX

Established: 1982

The city of Austin wasn't always the bustling music center it is today. In fact, when Waterloo Records first opened their doors back in the early '80s Austin was more of a tech-driven town than music and arts inclined. It wasn't until the coming years that the modest music scene would explode into the magnetic musical utopia we see today. Waterloo, however, was there to witness it all, from the initial SXSW music festival to the growth of the Austin Record Convention into one of the largest in the country.

Their store has grown as well, offering everything under the sun within their 6,400 square foot facility that now hosts live performances and events which are open to the public and always free. It's the neighborhood record store that has expanded into a city staple, making it a can't miss whenever you find yourself within the People's Republic of Austin.

WATERLOO RECORDS



PHOTO: BILL HOBBS

GRIMEY'S NEW & PRELOVED MUSIC

Location: Nashville, TN

Established: 2000

Located in yet another one of America's finest music towns, Grimey's New & Preloved Music is one of Nashville's premier independent record stores, which is saying a lot. And in addition to housing a fine collection of LPs, Grimey's also sells CDs and DVDs for the entertainment addict. Live performances are also routine within the store, consisting of touring and locals artists in the music scene putting their best foot forward for early exposure.

What's great about Grimey's isn't just the location south of downtown Nashville, but that music fans have a second location to enjoy all the perks the Grimey's team has to offer. They also offer a slew of free giveaways and contests to keep loyal customers and fans even happier on a weekly basis. Some southern hospitality at its finest.

GRIMEY'S NEW & PRELOVED MUSIC



PHOTO: VINTAGE VINYL

VINTAGE VINYL

Location: St. Louis, MO

Established: 1979

Several decades ago two friends decided to pool their resources and open a record store to spite all the sub-par offerings in and around the St. Louis area. And what started as just a 300 record stand at the local Farmer's Market every Saturday soon grew year after year into the current 7,000 square foot facility they enjoy today. Sure, there were down times and slow years, but perseverance was key. After all, as founder Tom Ray once said, "Music will get you through times of no money better than money will get you through times of no music." We couldn't agree more. And neither could their customers. Today Vintage Vinyl curates thousands of titles from artists every genre from punk to latin jazz to rock and classical. They also sell and DVDs on site and work to update their new release bins on a weekly basis.

To be honest, we couldn't agree more. And neither could their customers. Today Vintage Vinyl curates thousands of titles from artists of every genre from punk to latin to jazz to rock and classical. They also sell DVDs on site and work to update their new release bins on a weekly basis.

VINTAGE VINYL



PHOTO: BRIAN PENNINGTON

JERRY'S RECORDS

Location: Pittsburgh, PA

Established: 1970s

It's hard not to trust the merits behind a record store that's served the blue-collar city of Pittsburgh for more than 40 years. And the numbers only get more impressive as the facts reveal themselves. Currently, Jerry's is home to over 1 million albums and 12" singles, a reason in and of itself to pay the brick and mortar behemoth a visit. They sell everything under the sun as well, obviously, with titles across genres of metal, hip-hop, disco, jazz, big band, country, and reggae. And that's just scratching the surface.

One glaring difference with Jerry's is that you won't find any unopened or sealed vinyl there. It's all used, all the time, which makes for such an impressive selection. But don't worry. They screen, alphabetize and organize these incoming albums by name and popularity. Jerry's also hosts several listening booths for those anxious to hear the quality for themselves before making a purchase. It's truly a music lovers paradise.

JERRY'S RECORDS



PHOTO: AMOEBAS MUSIC

AMOEBAS MUSIC

Location: San Francisco, CA

Established: 1990

With locations in Berkeley, San Francisco, and Hollywood, suggesting that Amoeba Music caters to the diverse and eclectic music lover would be an understatement. They stock all kinds of titles and genres from your Top 40's hits to underground avant-garde experimental. Amoeba also stocks movie titles, hosts live shows at their Hollywood location and serve as an all-around community for like-minded individuals.

First opening their doors in 1990 in Berkeley, Amoeba almost immediately established a connection with city's music lovers. Since then, they've worked to maintain that relationship as they expanded across the state, now considered one of the premier records stores on the West Coast with hundreds of thousands of titles across their three stores locations. You'd be hard pressed to find something that didn't suit your style and taste around these parts.

AMOEBAS MUSIC



PHOTO: TWIST & SHOUT

TWIST & SHOUT

Location: Denver, CO

Established: 1988

Similar to other business owners, Paul Epstein and Jill Parrish opened Twist & Shout in 1988 in response to a problem they wished to remedy. That problem was the closing of Paul's favorite record store in Denver, and that solution turned out to be the current 11,000 square foot record store that Paul and Jill own today. It's widely considered one of the top music destinations in the country, boasting an incredible amount of LPs, CDs, and DVDs to choose from.

And just like any proper music and lifestyle storefront, Twist & Shout has hosted performances by the likes of Elvis Costello, Patti Smith, Atmosphere, and My Morning Jacket among many others. They specialize in rare and imported vinyl LPs and over the years have served millions of music fans both local and visiting while continuing to look for new ways to contribute to the contemporary music world.

TWIST & SHOUT



PHOTO: PRINCETON RECORD EXCHANGE

PRINCETON RECORD EXCHANGE

Location: Princeton, NJ

Established: 1980

What started as a young man selling records out of his van in the 1970s has since grown into one of the premier record stores in the Northeast. Barry, the owner, after growing tired of living and working out of his van, opened up shop in 1980 in Princeton, NJ where they have resided ever since. Located just off campus, they buy and sell used LPs, DVDs and CDs covering a wide range of genres of which they boast an inventory of over 60,000 LPs and CDs and 10,000 DVDs.

And if you're worried about your peculiar taste in music and movies, don't be, as their music selection expands the distant regions of rock, oldies, jazz, and the classics along with an equally diverse and interesting library of DVDs.

PRINCETON RECORD EXCHANGE



PHOTO: ENCORE RECORDS

ENCORE RECORDS

Location: Ann Arbor, MI

Established: 2011

Located next to the University of Michigan, it's easy to see why this college staple has enjoyed so much success over the years. And with their buy, sell, and trade business model, there's never a shortage of strange and interesting music, movies or memorabilia available for pick up. In addition to selling LPs, interested buyers may find old school reel-to-reel tapes and cassettes, blue-ray DVDs, books on music and musicians along with old sheet music for those self-taught individuals interested in continuing their education.

In terms of the music itself, Encore Records is a constant Rolodex of music rotating in and out of the storefront. Everything from classic rock to jazz to electronic music can be found in their ever expanding library. They also host semi-regular performances on site as well. With all this entertainment around, it's hard to believe the University of Michigan student body finds time to study at all.

ENCORE RECORDS



PHOTO: WATERLOO RECORDS

DAVE'S RECORDS

Location: Chicago, IL

Established: 1980s

Unlike many other record stores around the nation, Dave's Records in Chicago is 100 percent devoted to vinyl. Even the sign on their front door states, "No CDS! Never had 'em! Never will!" They carry all speeds, all formats and all styles for the curious audiophile. From soul to jazz to house to disco to reggae to blues and rock if it requires a needle and record player then odds are it's been through Dave's doors.

Part of the charm of Dave's Records is the quaint vibe you get inside the store, and, of course, the 40,000 titles that are available on any given day. They host everything including new releases as well as imported and reissued vinyl for those looking for some rarities. And even if you aren't in the area, they might even hook you up given the right circumstances. Just drop them a line if you're interested.

DAVE'S RECORDS



PHOTO: ANGELA N.

EASY STREET RECORDS

Location: Seattle, WA

Established: 1988

What better way to curb that appetite after record hunting all day than with a bite to eat in a local cafe or restaurant? Well, leave it to Seattle-based Easy Street Records to capitalize on that idea with their adjacent cafe and restaurant in addition to their record store. They've been in the business since the late '80s (opening the cafe in 2001) selling a range of new releases and used records for music fans across the city, as well as participating in ticket giveaways and selling their fair share of merchandise along the way.

Easy Street is the prime example of how a record store can easily transform into a neighborhood staple hosting community events for their customers on a regular basis. Their range of genres includes rock, hip-hop, R&B, electronic, metal, jazz, and world music along with many other under-the-radar bands only a city like Seattle could uncover.

EASY STREET RECORDS



PHOTO: DUSTY GROOVE

DUSTY GROOVE

Location: Chicago, IL

Established: 1996

The latter part of the '90s was certainly not an ideal time to open up a record store. The realm of CDs was taking off and we were just a few short years away from the onslaught of digital file sharing. Nevertheless, the good people at Dusty Groove has a vision and through hard work and a little perseverance (their first office was an old apartment formerly lived in by a Chicago prostitute in Hyde Park), they became one of the most well-known record storefronts in the Chicago area.

This year they celebrate their 20th anniversary, selling everything from used CDs to books, magazines, DVDs, turntables and of course a massive collection of new and used vinyl from artists of all sorts of genres. If music is your passion, this place is a must-see and if can't find what you're looking for, we're sorry to say but there's no pleasing you.

DUSTY GROOVE



PHOTO: GOOGLE

A-1 RECORD SHOP

Location: New York, NY

Established: 1996

Tucked within Manhattan Island's East Village is a quaint record store specializing in rare soul, jazz, and hip-hop. This is New York after all. It's also catered to the city's ever-expanding DJ population, offering an eclectic selection of one-offs and rarities found within these genres for their mixing pleasure. And in case you're interested in checking it out for yourself, they feature several selections of in-house mixes on their website.

There's certainly something to be said of such a model that's worked for 20 years. In direct contradiction to many other record stores, this archaic model is almost worth as much as the selection itself. Whatever the case, it's gems like this that only serve to support the notion of New York as a world class city.

A-1 RECORD SHOP



PHOTO: ELVERT BARNES

SOM RECORDS

Location: Washington D.C

Established: 2005

Anyone who's remotely interested in independent cafes, art galleries, or music would find solace in D.C.'s Adams Morgan neighborhood, the northwest corner of the city. One such staple of the neighborhood is Som Records, which has gained significant attention over the past decade. They specialize in rock, funk, disco, go-go, reggae, salsa, folk, blues, punk, and electronica, and while their space is underground and cozy, the selection here is one that mirrors many of the great record stores throughout the nation.

In terms of quality, Som offers used, new, imported, and rare vinyl for purchase and will even take some old gems off your hand for cash or in exchange for that new release album you need to own but don't necessarily have the coin to pick up. Clearly, Som is a quintessential neighborhood record store and a must-see for any vinyl devotee.

SOM RECORDS



PHOTO: ED KOHLER

THE ELECTRIC FETUS

Location: Minneapolis, MN

Established: 1968

The first thing you notice about this brick and mortar record store is the name. Though when we found out this store was founded by two hippies in 1968 who received multiple citations for their questionable storefront art, everything began to make sense. It's an archaic yet cozy and neighborly "Mom 'n Pop" music store that, since their founding, hosted all sorts of strange business practices. One such event -dubbed the "Streakers Sale"- allowed customers to take all that they could carry in both hands as long as they shopped in their birthday suits.

Weird we know, but it's these strange and eclectic moments that establish a records store's reputation within a neighborhood. Today, they host in-store performances, sell tickets to shows around town, own two additional locations, and carry a wide array of artists from classical to reggae to rock and pop genres.

THE ELECTRIC FETUS



PHOTO: THE SOUND GARDEN

THE SOUND GARDEN

Location: Baltimore, MD

Established: 1993

Though it's unlikely this record store attributes its name to Chis Cornell's grungy Seattle rock band from the 90s, one can never be quite sure. Whatever the case, The Sound Garden has served up some of the best vinyl collections around in this East Coast port city for the better part of two decades. They currently reside in a 2,500 square foot facility that houses an immense selection of CDs, DVDs, LPs, video games, and Blu-Rays.

In addition to their monstrous library, The Sound Garden also specializes in obscure and rare titles along with releases from smaller, independent labels. They also host in-store performances and will happily special order anything that isn't already on the shelves at no additional cost.

THE SOUND GARDEN



PHOTO: VINYL DAZE RECORDS

VINYL DAZE RECORDS

Location: Virginia Beach, VA

Established: 2011

Just because they're one of the newer kids on the block doesn't make this beach-centric record store any less impressive. Vinyl Daze has managed to do quite well for themselves over the years, procuring an underground punk and metal collection unlike many of their counterparts. Of course, there are the classics like jazz and blues along with a slew of new releases across all genres that fuel the exciting vibe as you enter Vinyl Daze as well.

You won't find other forms of music here besides vinyl, which is a refreshing notion that actually provides a bit of a time-warped atmosphere for the interested browser. However, they serve up some quality sound equipment in the form of turntables and headphones from brands such as Sony, Denon, JBL, Bang & Olufsen, and Acoustic Research, easily making this a one-stop-shop for those new to the vinyl game as well as veteran listeners. Just remember that sand and wax don't mix.

VINYL DAZE RECORDS



PHOTO: BIKING BETTIE

MISSISSIPPI RECORDS

Location: Portland, OR

Established: 2003

Taking its namesake from their own record label, Mississippi Records in North Portland sticks to their guns in the world of vintage. It's a cash-only joint, with a sign on their front door reading "Always... Love Over Gold" alluding to the storefront's reasonable prices for their entire collection. The focus here is on Americana, international, and punk releases but as with every brick and mortar store browsers can harvest plenty of jazz, french pop, indie, and folk as well.

Since their opening in the early 2000s, Mississippi Records has depended solely on word of mouth for their marketing. They don't have a website or a Facebook page for their store or their label. However, their label has grown to over 162 releases and the cozy cottage that is Mississippi Records has garnered statewide and national attention for their collection and business model.

MISSISSIPPI RECORDS

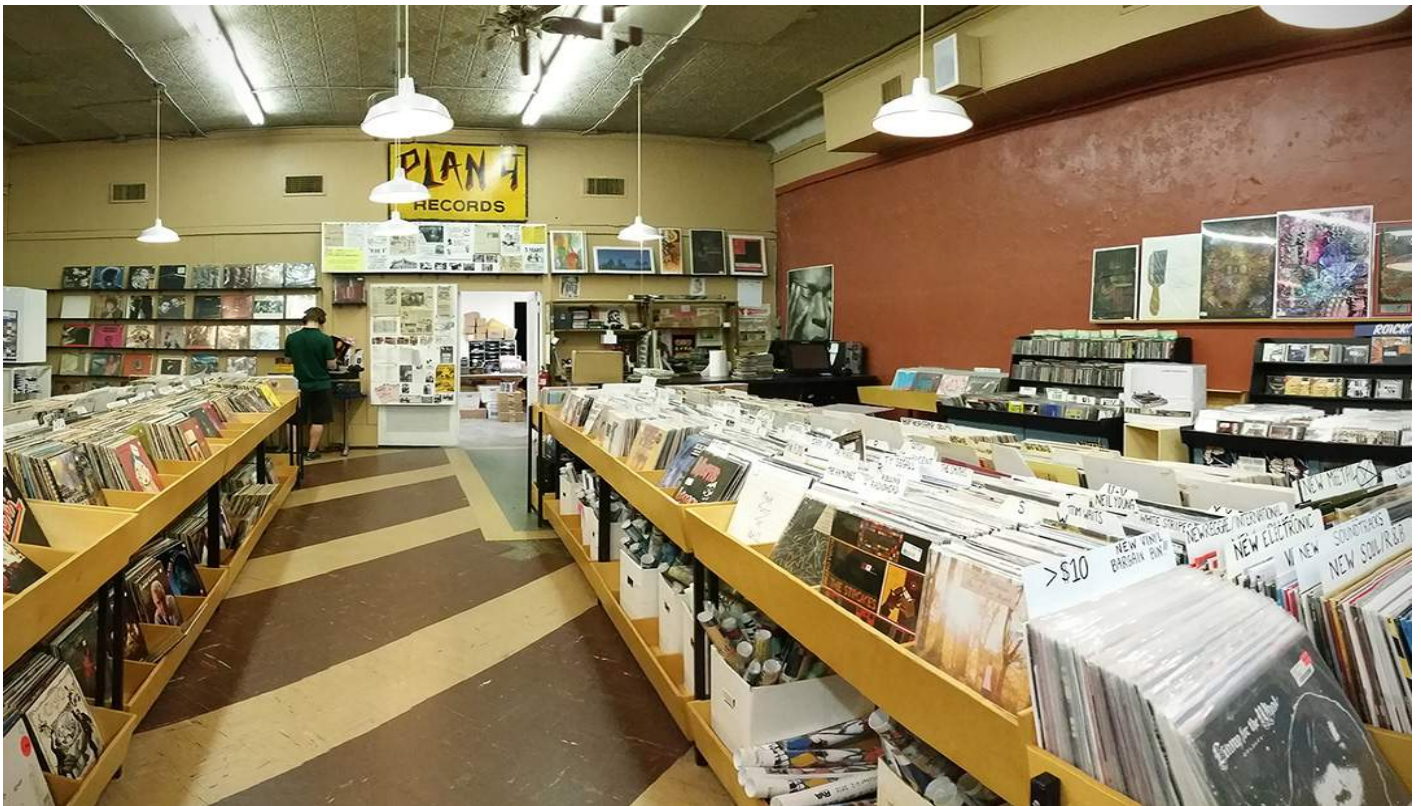


PHOTO: ELI CHRISTMAN

PLAN 9 MUSIC

Location: Richmond, VA

Established: 1981

Taking the name from the widely regarded worst movie ever made, *Plan 9 from Outer Space*, Plan 9 Music has been a Richmond staple for any and all vinyl, CDs, cassettes, and DVDs well before the city began its transition into the eccentric art-friendly town it is today. Customers can expect to find just about anything under the sun at Plan 9, including their ongoing support of local musicians. At any given time there are over 300 titles on consignment from area bands in addition to their expansive library of new and use titles.

Plan 9 is also known for their in-store performances, and their collection covers all desired genres from bluegrass to hip-hop to jazz to of course punk and metal. They also sponsor a local music festival ever year, working to spread the love of music and vinyl to fans throughout the region.

PLAN 9 MUSIC

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