

# Passing Notes

JULIAN MUSGRAVE DELIVERS THE FIRST EPISODE IN THE DIARY OF AN AUDIOPHILE

## Two New Vinyl Recruits

My Daughter Ruth and her husband Uriel have just bought themselves a turntable. Small rejoicings in High End Land. Or maybe it's just another two thirty-something fashionistas flirting with the retro-tech of the day. Flashing their Bowies as they sashay up the high street. "Ooooo, that needle is just so gleamy" they squeak before gouging a Stones first pressing.

Will they fall off the wagon at the first jump groove (jump groove, jump groove)? Or maybe Dad, being such a blabber-mouthed loony about these things, has simply infected them. With good sanitation and a spell in an alpine sanatorium they should be back happily file-serving before the end of the week.

Or maybe not. Because the start point of this particular journey is their own, self-generated, grumbling discontent with filed audio, not fashion or Dad. And the grumbling discontent here is the well-aided fact that music files lack any degree of tangibility. The feeling that something as important as music should have some sort of physical representation in the world. Humans are very tactile creatures, especially with the things we really care about.

We can live with Amazon, Google and the Inland Revenue being virtual; actually we prefer them that way. But with people, pets and Prokofiev physicality is irreplaceable. You cannot hug a data file like you can an LP and all the other joys of collectability are missing too. Hell, Ruth wakes up in the middle of the night pining for the CDs she gave away after ripping them all. No, really. That's grumbling discontent double plus.

So on the first Saturday of our recent US holiday we all drove to Boston and hit the vinyl stores. Our first destination, **In Your Ear** on Commonwealth Avenue, could be straight out of a Mervyn Peake novel. It's in a basement, is smelly, dusty, claustrophobic, impossible to navigate, staffed by semi-human denizens of the night and has stacks of 8-track, cassettes and crap old audio equipment piled up to the flaking ceiling (see picture!). So a regular vinyl hang-out, then and the perfect destination for a bright, sunny October day.

We split to browse our various aisles, gasps of joy and surprise bouncing off the dungeon walls.



Brandon Music

Uriel got a *Best of Arlo Guthrie* (\$2.99), *Art Tatum – The Genius* (\$3.99) and more. Ruth pigged out on Rachmaninov piano stuff (\$1- 1.99/LP). I found an un-played, boxed set of Glen Gould playing Mozart sonatas, in mint condition, for \$4.99; something that has eluded me for years beyond recall. I wept so copiously that my shoes glued to the floor and it took several strong men and a road drill to unstick them. \$4.99? I would have sacrificed a grandchild for it.

## Orpheus Performing Arts

Orpheus PA is also on Commonwealth Avenue, but about two miles further towards the city centre. Here a lady with a voice pitched three Hertz north of G#, and thus inordinately annoying, talked at us for forty minutes as we tried to concentrate on higher things while tripping over boxes of unsorted LPs, each other, and a nifty selection of dead rodents. I hardly need to say it was also in a basement, smelly, dusty etc.

I did eventually manage to find a DG boxed set of Hans Pfitzner's opera *Palestrina* (very gloomy) and Lazar Berman playing *Annees de Pelerinage* (oodles of muscular Lisztianity). Uriel got an Incredible String Band and Ruth another Alicia de Larrocha. There were more stores and more finds but you get the general drift.

Later that evening, over beer, potato chips and malt whisky we spun discs, raved over cover artwork, wondered why the number of truly satisfying recordings of Chopin can be counted on the fingers of one finger and then signed off with Pink Floyd before oozing effortlessly into pleasure-sated unconsciousness. Tangibility has its own rewards.

## Adam Karch

The next weekend after days in Boston, New York and Cape Cod we drove north to, ahem, Vermont. Don't laugh now; someone has to go there. Vermont is inhabited by polite, peaceful beings; most of them tall and leafy. My guess is that Vermont is the world's tree capital. Drive for hours, no days, and all you see is trees. By and large I am sympathetic to trees. Innocent souls, I tell myself. Few (if any) knife crimes are committed by trees. They don't shout obscenities if you fail to buy *The Big Issue*. But trillions of hectares of the things is, one concludes, ever so slightly spooky. We stayed in a lakeside log cabin (well you would wouldn't you) surrounded somewhat gloomily by trees, went to bed and do you know, the blasted trees were still there in the morning. Don't they ever give up?

Saturday evening we were sat at a table in the small (wood build, natch) concert hall of Brandon Music<sup>1</sup> (pictured left) having a fine dinner and listening to one Adam Karch, a Canadian blues and