

## Vinyl Freak: Love Letters to a Dying Medium

**John Corbett**

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*This celebration of vinyl speaks to the transience of pop culture and its intersection with everyday lives.*

For twelve years, music critic, curator, and collector John Corbett immortalized records that never made it as CDs, in his “Vinyl Freak” column for *Downbeat* magazine. In *Vinyl Freak: Love Letters to a Dying Medium*, he presents those passionately written columns, paired with thoughtful essays on the allure of records, the collecting subculture, and the pleasure and pain of archives.

With its lyricism and metaphors, Corbett’s writing is befitting of a love letter. As he writes, hunting for records felt like “there was a parallel universe of significance as yet unyielding of its secrets, a mute realm that was nonetheless uncontrollably seductive.” Although CDs initially threatened to kill off records, the vinyl medium makes a comeback. Corbett artfully presents its revival as he would that of a sick loved one: “the patient begins to make a miraculous recovery” and “nearly makes a full remission.”

Each column is devoted to one or two records, and Corbett covers everything from flipping the stacks to find the albums to their place in music history. In one such column, he retells the pleasure of finding a rare Lee “Scratch” Perry LP in an otherwise lackluster thrift store. Corbett describes the record sleeve, the initial release and label, the reissues, and vinyl pressing quality, before highlighting the actual music.

He recounts one track as “the most incredible moment in the Scratch oeuvre ... the backing band audibly raised and lowered, like a hand is reaching into the music and reconfiguring it,” adding that it foreshadowed Public Enemy by twenty years. Other columns take a more bemused perspective, such as of the time in Lisbon, Portugal, when he found an album in which Korean women cover tracks by Elvis Presley, Johnnie Taylor, and Sly Stone.

*Vinyl Freak: Love Letters to a Dying Medium* could have easily been a stale trip down memory lane by a record collector. Yet Corbett takes an almost philosophical look at how music passes through listening mediums and what that means for listeners. As a result, the text will appeal to both vinyl freaks and non-freaks as it speaks to the transience of pop culture and its intersection with everyday lives.

AMANDA MCCORQUODALE (May/June 2017)

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