



Left to Right: Dr. Dineen (faculty advisor), Helen Yu, Jane Hu, Zachary Ji, Aritra Ray, Kanishk Mogha, Angela Zhang, Benjamin Li, and Derek Hu.

Princeton High School

Princeton, NJ

Spinning Back: The Resurgence of Vinyl

HELEN: Welcome back to our newest episode of *Off the Record*, where we talk about the hottest topics in the music industry! My name is Helen, and I am joined by my co-hosts, Zach, Jane, and Ben.

JANE: Today we are diving into the rapid resurgence of vinyl records. Ben, what are your thoughts on it?

BEN: Hmm...I know that my dad collects a lot of vinyl, but I thought vinyl was more of an old-timer fad. It is really interesting that even though we have free access to music streaming services now we still choose to buy physical music formats such as vinyl.

ZACH: What's even more interesting is that, in 2023, almost 50% of the people who buy vinyl don't even have a vinyl record player (*Luminate*)! Back in our parents' generation, they had to buy vinyl because that was their only way to enjoy recorded music, but it seems like nowadays we choose to buy vinyl mainly for a collector's item.

HELEN: I like how you mentioned collecting. I feel like the current vinyl market best serves music lovers who are devoted to a particular artist they like.

BEN: So, what exactly about the vinyl market will we be talking about today?

HELEN: We will be looking into how this resurgence has affected the music industry both socially and economically.

JANE: Let's start off with what caused the vinyl resurgence.

HELEN: Sure! During the early 2000s, digital online music sales took off, following the introduction of Apple's iPod and iPhone. Our

STUDENT AUTHORS

Derek Hu

Jane Hu

Zachary Ji

Benjamin Li

Kanishk Mogha

Aritra Ray

Helen Yu

Angela Zhang

FACULTY ADVISOR

Katie Dineen

CITATION STYLE

MLA 8th Edition

In 2022, vinyl sales surpassed CD sales for the first time since 1987. In 2024, physical music products generated a total revenue of \$2 billion, with vinyl sales accounting for \$1.4 billion of that and making up three-quarters of physical music sales.

consumption of music shifted from removable media (vinyl, tapes, CDs) to selecting music to listen to within an entirely digitalized space. Nonetheless, technological progress also led to a growing “retro” movement, nostalgic for past eras from the 1970s to 1990s, and opposed or resistant to adapting to digital music in favor of upholding older styles (“Retro Revival: Embracing Vintage Style in the Modern World”).

JANE: Let’s break this down. In 1987, the vinyl market was valued at \$2.5 billion, but by 1993 it had dropped all the way down to \$10.6 million, and it stayed at approximately the same valuation until 2008 (Mall). However, with the influence of the retro movement, vinyl has made an incredible comeback. During the COVID-19 pandemic, vinyl sales increased by 55%, reaching \$1 billion for the first time since 1985. With fewer live concerts by artists whose heyday was decades ago, fans found another way to support their favorite legacy artists: purchasing their reissued vinyl (Jordan).

ZACH: Wow! “Incredible comeback” is an understatement there.

BEN: The resurgence didn’t end there. In 2022, vinyl sales surpassed CD sales for the first time since 1987. In 2024, physical music products generated a total revenue of \$2 billion, with vinyl sales accounting for \$1.4 billion of that and making up three-quarters of physical music sales (RIAA and Bass). In the upcoming years, the market for vinyl records is projected to triple by 2032, with an annual growth rate of 14.4% (Phapale).

HELEN: Interestingly, the rise in vinyl’s popularity occurred concurrently with the rise in streaming. As streaming became more popular, vinyl sales simultaneously increased. This is in part due to people’s tendency to buy on vinyl songs and albums they first listened to on a streaming platform such as Spotify or Apple Music.

50% of vinyl record buyers don’t even own a record player.

BEN: Let’s go back to that key statistic: that 50% of vinyl record buyers don’t even own a record player. So why are they buying records in the first place?

JANE: The reason for this hints at the crux of the record boom: buying records is seen as a status symbol, not a good in itself with maximum utility for consuming music.

ZACH: These consumer behaviors pertaining to vinyl allow vinyl records to be categorized as “Veblen goods”: higher-value goods sought out simply because of their exclusivity and price.

JANE: In effect, the high prices of these records are not due to their inherent value, but rather, simply based on how much people who want to own them are willing to pay. When we pay upwards of \$50 for a Taylor Swift record rather than streaming her for free, we see this in action.

What’s more, demand for a certain good by individuals of a higher income level appears inversely related to demand by those of a lower income level who may find the high price tag a little out of reach.

ZACH: The reason why vinyl records can be considered a Veblen good is because the behavior you just described leads to an upward-sloping demand curve. As the price goes up, the demand actually increases. This concept was named after the economist Thorstein Veblen, who wrote *The Theory of the Leisure Class* back in 1899, in which he analyzed the reasons for luxury-goods consumption patterns.

JANE: At the heart of the vinyl-collecting trend, then, is Veblen’s idea of “conspicuous consumption.”

HELEN: And nowhere is the idea of conspicuous consumption more clear than the social-media-ridden world of Gen Z. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it’s not just Ben’s dad who collects vinyl—the resurgence is actually driven by Gen Z.

JANE: It’s true. The proportion of people listening to physical musical



Record enthusiasts rapidly search through boxes of vinyl records on the opening day of the annual WFMU Record Fair.

(Photo by Spencer Platt/Getty Images)

formats such as vinyl, cassettes and CDs is greatest amongst 18-to-24-year-olds (*MusicWeek*). According to a report by International Audio Tech Lifestyle, 60% of Gen Z have bought vinyl records, with nearly two-thirds buying them in the past year (Futuresource Consulting). A global survey of 2,500 fans found that 76% of Gen Z vinyl listeners buy records at least once a month, and they're not quiet about it—there are 252 million posts on TikTok relating to “vinyl” or “vinyl records” alone (Vinyl Alliance; *MusicWeek*).



(L-R) Sam Calagione, Kosmo Vinyl, Todd Barry, Kate Pierson, and Annie Clark attend The 2015 Record Store Day Press Conference at Rough Trade Records, on March 10, 2015 in the Brooklyn borough of New York City.

(Photo by Stephen Lovekin/Getty Images)

HELEN: Though you'd think Gen-Zers would be attracted to the latest technology—with unlimited streaming at their fingertips—they've actually learned to embrace so-called “outdated” vinyl.

BEN: Chalk one up for the oldies!

JANE: Yet, Gen Z's love of vinyl is a direct result of the social media landscape fueling it: 50% of Gen Z vinyl buyers said they

collect vinyl records to take a break from digital life. They're also more likely to replace streaming with vinyl-only listening breaks to improve mental well-being (Vinyl Alliance; *MusicWeek*).

BEN: I find it so interesting that Gen Z's leading this return to physical media. They're longing for a music era they never got to experience: authentic, physical, tangible connection in contrast to the increased digitalization of society today. The pursuit and acquisition of vinyl records represents an escape from this digitalization.

HELEN: This stronger connection to music that Gen Z is seeking with vinyl can be explained by the “endowment effect.” Simply put, the endowment effect is the cognitive bias that people have towards objects they own rather than objects they do not (Kahneman et al.).

BEN: That makes sense, right?

JANE: Well, let me take a step back. The endowment effect was popularized by the famous “mug experiment” done by Daniel Kahneman and his colleagues, in 1990. Random participants were given a coffee mug and given the choice of whether or not to sell it. The study found that the price for which participants were willing to sell the mug about doubled when they had ownership (\$5.25) as compared to how much participants would be willing to pay to buy the mug, having never previously owned it (\$2.25-\$2.75) (Kahneman, Knetsch, et al.).

ZACH: Physical ownership creates psychological attachment and thus a willingness to assign a higher value to something. The owner of the mug had formed a cognitive bias, thus he felt the mug was worth twice as much as a prospective buyer would be willing to pay.

HELEN: Hmm...So, applying this to music, does this explain the rise in vinyl collecting?

JANE: Indeed! With streaming services, you can access millions of tracks for pretty much zero cost. Now, think about vinyl: buying a physical, tangible vinyl record, you can see and feel the grooves. That one vinyl copy belongs to you. It’s like a way to own the music you listen to and experience a stronger personal connection with the music. Streaming democratized access to all music, but vinyl lets us define what is truly our music.

BEN: This hasn’t gone unseen by artists. In releasing limited-edition vinyl, artists cater to diehard fans in a more direct fashion.

ZACH: In 2025, Taylor Swift’s *The Life of a Showgirl* sold 1.334 million vinyl copies in its first week of release and featured eight different limited-edition versions (Caulfield). One limited-edition variant of this album, the “Shiny Bug Collection,” was launched on her website and sold out within an hour (Campbell).

JANE: This is the scarcity effect of commodity theory in practice: people tend to assign higher values to goods that are seen as scarce (Brehm et al.). When fans see limited-edition vinyl records from their favorite artists, they are willing and eager to pay the higher price, even if they could listen to the same music for a lower cost through streaming.

This stronger connection to music that Gen Z is seeking with vinyl can be explained by the “endowment effect.” Simply put, the endowment effect is the cognitive bias that people have towards objects they own rather than objects they do not .

The supply side of vinyl is just as important as the demand side, especially as demand has increased exponentially.

HELEN: That makes so much sense. No wonder Record Store Day is so popular!

BEN: That's right. Record Store Day is a prime example of how scarcity drives demand and drives the "hype cycle" along with it. It is a blueprint of how to create excitement that successfully reshapes consumer demand.

ZACH: The premise of Record Store Day is to create artificial scarcity, with labels releasing limited editions just for that day. This practice creates both immediate demand and long-term demand for secondhand versions, as supplies are extremely limited.

JANE: And that's important because these releases have a very real impact on store sales numbers: stores saw a more than 600% increase in sales on Record Store Day, compared to other Saturdays, and 43 of the 50 top-selling vinyl titles were released on Record Store Day itself (Palm).

[Jazz music plays]

Stores saw a more than 600% increase in sales on Record Store Day, compared to other Saturdays, and 43 of the 50 top-selling vinyl titles were released on Record Store Day itself.

JANE: We've discussed the reasons why people want music on vinyl, but what about the production process itself?

ZACH: The supply side of vinyl is just as important as the demand side, especially as demand has increased exponentially. Vinyl production is expensive and slow, which also contributes to its status as a Veblen good, as we discussed earlier.

BEN: The production system for vinyl records relies on machines and infrastructure that became defunct with the rise of CDs in the early 1980s. Vinyl's resurgence has meant many companies still rely on outdated and refurbished machines from the 1970s (Sisario).

ZACH: A foundational issue with vinyl production is that there are not enough plants with skilled workers to use the machines. Making

vinyl records is not a fully automated process; operators must understand the temperature and pressure required so that the vinyl is cut properly and doesn't warp (Palm). Training those workers takes time, and there's no pool of experienced operators waiting to be put to work.

BEN: This leads to overwhelming bottlenecks. When artists decide to release three variants of an album, plants can't increase their output overnight to cater to the increased demand.

JANE: What about the Apollo Masters fire in 2020? How did that change the industry?

HELEN: Unfortunately, the Apollo Masters Corporation was one of two major producers of lacquer discs used in manufacturing vinyl records, making 70–85% of market supply (Blistein). Moreover, it was the *only* U.S.-based producer of the discs, which are crucial to the process of translating music from its source to the vinyl grooves.

BEN: The resulting delays and shortages have caused both reckoning and renovation with the industry. But this event goes to show how fragile the supply chain for vinyl is. Just one factory fire threatened worldwide vinyl production and put the music industry, loved by so many, on notice.

JANE: In light of the supply-chain shortages you just mentioned, it makes sense that a new market has evolved for vinyl: the secondary market. Burgeoning demand, artificial scarcity, and supply-chain shortages all have helped grow a robust secondary market for vinyl.

HELEN: Normally, when you purchase a good, its resale value immediately falls. Vinyl records—being Veblen goods—actually exhibit the opposite behavior, where resales and private market sales can fetch thousands of dollars.



Factory worker Martin Frings peels apart a finished master and positive copy of a vinyl record, also known as a “stamper” used to press vinyl records, at The Vinyl Factory in London, UK.

(Photo by Chris J. Ratcliffe/ Getty Images)

ZACH: That's right. This has led to the rise of the "flipper economy," with its root cause being the artificial scarcity created by limited editions. People are buying vinyl releases not to listen to them but sometimes sell them down the line, creating an investment value for these goods.

BEN: When resales go for over 400% of retail value, it also acts as a driver of the primary market. It tells record companies there is continuous unmet demand, which in turn can lead to re-presses—reproducing a previously issued record—allowing labels to capture the surplus value that the secondary market has identified. Demand is even catalogued and tracked through online vinyl marketplaces. For instance, in early 2024, a rare 1966 promotional copy of The Velvet Underground's debut single sold on Discogs for a staggering \$30,000 ("The Most Valuable Releases Sold on Discogs in 2024").



Fans wait in line to meet Wayne Coyne during *Wayne Coyne's Record Store Tour*, at Grimey's New and Preloved Music on December 19, 2013 in Nashville, Tennessee.

(Photo by Terry Wyatt/Getty Images)

JANE: In this way, the real importance of the secondary market for vinyl is that it creates a positive feedback loop to reinforce primary demand. This trend partly can help explain why demand for vinyl continues to thrive.

HELEN: So let's return to the central question: why would people ever want to buy records, if streaming services offer so much more variety and convenience?

BEN: Records act as a way to form a direct relationship between the listener and the artist. Listeners feel as though they are truly supporting their favorite artists, and being able to own their music on vinyl is like receiving a token of gratitude.

JANE: But this feeling of support is actually more than just a feeling. Profit margins for vinyl records are around 40% to 60% ("Can You Make a Profit Selling Vinyl and CDs?"), much higher than per-song income from streaming platforms. Vinyl records are becoming an

increasingly important part of artists' bottom lines.

BEN: Absolutely. For example, the streaming revenue of the popular rock band Twenty-One Pilots was roughly estimated to be equivalent to the revenue obtainable from the sale of 10,000 to 30,000 vinyl album copies. However, the band went on to sell 170,000 vinyl copies in reality, far surpassing those numbers (Stassen).

JANE: Rather than competing with vinyl sellers, streaming services like Spotify and Apple Music actually work hand in hand with the vinyl market. While those apps are a place for listeners to discover new music, records create a more tangible connection to the artist.

HELEN: Moreover, people have stopped buying vinyl records simply for their collector value, they buy them also for the connection and community that being a fan of vinyl records brings. In doing so, record stores have become important cultural hubs again.

Profit margins for vinyl records are around 40% to 60%, much higher than per-song income from streaming platforms.

BEN: In fact, some record shops practically turn themselves into festivals with live performances and DJ sets. This creates more of the kind of connection we've been talking about, where the store becomes a community for people who enjoy music.

JANE: Honestly, this really mirrors what's been happening in other industries as well. We're shifting from a disposable era towards things that have genuine meaning. For fans, vinyl records serve as a way to support artists directly rather than by patronizing the fraction-of-a-cent streaming services.

BEN: Definitely. Whether it's the sound quality, the status of a Veblen good, or just the idea of disconnecting from a screen, the vinyl resurgence proves that the "old" way of doing things sometimes has the most value.

HELEN: So old really is gold! Well then, that's a wrap for today's episode. Thanks for tuning into *Off the Record*, and we'll see you all in the next one.

WORKS CITED

- Blistein, Jon. "‘This Is Disastrous’: How the Vinyl Industry Is Responding to the Apollo Masters Fire." *Rolling Stone*, 18 February 2020, <https://www.rollingstone.com/pro/news/vinyl-industry-apollo-masters-fire-951903/>.
- Brehm, Jack W., et al. *Psychological Foundations of Attitudes*. Edited by Leon Festinger et al., Academic Press, 1968, api.pageplace.de/preview/DT0400.9781483258515_A23865905/preview-9781483258515_A23865905.pdf.
- Campbell, Johanna. "Taylor Swift’s ‘The Life of a Showgirl’ limited edition vinyl sells out in under an hour." *RouteNote Blog*, 19 Aug. 2025, <routenote.com/blog/taylor-swift-life-of-a-showgirl-limited-vinyl>.
- "Can you make a profit selling vinyl and CDs?" *Bandzoogle Blog*, 5 July 2024, <bandzoogle.com/blog/can-you-make-a-profit-selling-vinyl-and-cds>.
- Caulfield, Keith. "Taylor Swift’s ‘The Life of a Showgirl’ Is Luminate’s Top Album of 2025 in U.S." *Billboard*, 18 Jan. 2026, <www.billboard.com/pro/luminate-2025-year-end-music-report-taylor-swift-showgirl>.
- "From Revival to Renaissance: How Gen Z Is Redefining Vinyl in the Modern Era." <www.recordoftheday.com/news-and-press/from-revival-to-renaissance-how-gen-z-is-redefining-vinyl-in-the-modern-era>.
- Futuresource Consulting. "From TikTok Discovery to Vinyl Revival, Gen Z Is Reshaping the Conventional Soundscape: Audio Tech Lifestyles" *Futuresource*, 28 Sept. 2025, <www.futuresource-consulting.com/the-source/industry-pulse/from-tiktok-discovery-to-vinyl-revival-gen-z-is-reshaping-the-conventional-soundscape-audio-tech-lifestyles>.
- Jordan, Jilayne. "The Surprising Resurrection of the Vinyl Records Industry in the Digital Age." Camoin Associates, 18 Dec. 2025, <camoinassociates.com/resources/vinyl-records-resurrection>.
- Kahneman, Daniel, Jack L. Knetsch, et al. "Anomalies: The Endowment Effect, Loss Aversion, and Status Quo Bias." *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, vol. 5, no. 1, Feb. 1991, pp. 193–206, <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/jep.5.1.193>.
- Kahneman, Daniel, Jack L. Knetch, et al. "Experimental Tests of the Endowment Effect and the Coase Theorem." *Journal of Political Economy*, pp. 1325–48, <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/261737>.
- Luminate*. "Top Entertainment Industry Trends: What the Data Says, as Presented at SXSW 2023." 3 Mar. 2026, <luminatedata.com/reports/sxsw-top-entertainment-trends-for-2023>.
- Mall, Andrew. "Vinyl Revival." *University of California Press*, 21 Sept. 2021, <online.ucpress.edu/jpms/article/33/3/73/118549/Vinyl-Revival>. Accessed 15 Mar. 2026.
- "The Most Valuable Releases Sold on Discogs in 2024." Discogs, <www.discogs.com/digs/collecting/the-most-valuable-releases-sold-on-discogs-in-2024>. Accessed 15 Mar. 2026.
- MusicWeek*. "Vinyl Alliance says Gen-Z Is now the ‘driving force’ behind the format’s popularity." <www.musicweek.com/labels/read/vinyl-alliance-says-gen-z-is-now-the-driving-for-ce-behind-the-format-s-popularity/091294>.
- Palm, Michael. "Keeping What Real? Vinyl Records and the Future of Independent Culture." *Convergence the International Journal of Research Into New Media Technologies*, vol. 25, no. 4, Mar. 2019, pp. 643–56, doi:10.1177/1354856519835485.

Phapale, Sushant. "Vinyl Records Market." *Credence Research Inc.*, 12 June 2025, www.credenceresearch.com/report/vinyl-records-market.

"Retro Revival: Embracing Vintage Style in the Modern World." *Medium*, 3 Aug. 2023, medium.com/@EcoLogicLiving/retro-revival-embracing-vintage-style-in-the-modern-world-869cb8880812. Accessed 15 Mar. 2026.

RIAA, and Matt Bass. *RIAA 2024 Year-End Revenue Report*. 2024, www.riaa.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/RIAA-2024Year-End-Revenue-Report.pdf.

Sisario, Ben. "Vinyl LP Frenzy Brings Record-Pressing Machines Back to Life." *The New York Times*, 14 Sept. 2015, www.nytimes.com/2015/09/15/business/media/a-vinyl-lp-frenzy-brings-record-pressing-machines-back-to-life.html.

Stassen, Murray. "Physical music is powerful and under-leveraged. In 2026, it won't be a sideshow – it'll be a core strategic revenue and brand channel." *Music Business Worldwide*, 27 January 2026, <https://www.musicbusinessworldwide.com/physical-music-is-powerful-and-under-leveraged-in-2026-it-wont-be-a-sideshow-itll-be-a-core-strategic-revenue-and-brand-channel1/>

Vinyl Alliance. "The Vinyl Alliance Gen Z Report - *Vinyl Alliance*." *Vinyl Alliance - the Industry's Central Voice, for the Record.*, 15 Jan. 2026, vinylalliance.org/resources/gen-z-vinyl-report.