

The 45rpm Phono Gazette

By Gerry Whitehead

My name is Gerry Whitehead, and I too, like Phil Vourtsis, have a deep and abiding love for the RCA Victor 45 rpm record players. My story is like this: Like so many baby boomers, I got hooked on the first 45 player I ever saw the RCA Victor 45-EY-2 in 1958. Where I grew up, in Ontario, California, which is 35 miles east of Los Angeles, and 17 miles west of San Bernadino, I was living in an apartment with my parents and my sister, and attending Catholic Grade School. The previous year I was seven years old, and had broken my left arm while playing in front of the neighbor's house. After 11 days in traction in the hospital, I was finally sent home right after my birthday.

My parents had a late birthday gift waiting for me when I got home. It was a small 4-speed children's record player! I had mostly kiddie records and some of my Mom's big band 78 rpm records to play. There was a teenage-girl who lived across the way from us named Past Jones, who I would visit occasionally. She had a record player I had NEVER seen before that only played the funny-looking 45 rpm records with the large round hole in the center of the label. The fact that the spindle spun the record on top of the stack while the first record below it played on the turntable fascinated me. When I came over to visit, she would let me play with this amazing new toy! I would stack on 45s from her collection like "Black Denim Trousers and Motorcycle Boots" by the Cheers on Capital Records, "Bye Bye Love" by the Everly Brothers on Cadence records and the great rock n'roll instrumental "Raunchy" by Ernie Freeman on Imperial records, and Ricky Nelson's first hit for Imperial records, "Be-Bop Baby".

The really weird thing about this little record player (besides the fact that Pat repainted the outside bakelite cabinet with pink nail polish) was that you could stack up to 12 of the little 45s comfortably on the spindle! And unlike the bigger "Hi-Fis" of the era, instead of the turntable automatically turning off the unit after the last record on the stack played, it would simply repeat the last record over and over. One day, Pat gave me one of her 45s to take home as a gift. It was Elvis Presley's "Hound Dog/Don't Be Cruel", a double sided #1 hit for the "King of Rock and Roll" in the summer of 1956. One time I brought the Elvis 45 back to Pat for her to play on her 45 player. She apparently wasn't in the mood to visit with me. She took the Elvis 45 from me and said "You want this? Then go get it!!!!" She threw my Elvis frisbee across the courtyard of the apartment

building. It crashed on the rocks in front of the building and broke into a million pieces! Nowadays you would say that I was not a "Happy Camper"!

Why did she destroy a record she had previously given me as a gift? To this day I don't know. Maybe she had a boyfriend over there that was closer to her age than I was. In any event, maybe she later felt remorse over doing this random act of musical vandalism. In summertime of 1958, Pat bought me a 45 of Bobby Darin's first hit for Atco records, "Splish-Splash".



In the Fall of 1958, we learned that we were being evicted from our apartment, just because the landlord decided to move in a "sick relative". Just before we moved out, Pat Jones called me over to her place to show what her Mom had just bought her: A brand-new 1958 Magnavox Stereophonic Radio/Record player combo! It was a big piece of electronic furniture. In 1958, Stereophonic LPs had just become commercially available; this was the latest and greatest thing! Two-channel stereo sound was the very latest advance in recorded sound. She gave me a demonstration of how it worked and how great it sounded. Pat then said to me, "By the way, Gerry, I won't be needing my 45 player anymore. Would you like to have it?" Boy, would!!!! I was ecstatic to finally have this marvelous toy for my very own! For the next several years I played the small selection of 45s I had over and over again, often driving my parents NUTS. Stacking the 45s and watching the tone arm drop the little "skis" on the record groove continued to amaze me for several more years. By 1965, the little 45 player was in bad shape, the reject cycle was screwed up and my folks weren't interested in getting it fixed. I finally turned it over to my sister, Denise, who used to spin the spindle to try to make the turntable go and reject.

By this time (1965), rock was going from 45 rpm to 33.3 LP. Stereo was getting big. Mono LPs were all but gone in America by

1968. By this time, I had another small 4-speed automatic record player my folks gave me for Christmas 1961. In 1966 we gave the 45 player to the Salvation Army. With Stereo LPs the rage, the 45 player looked quite quaint, a relic of the Truman/Eisenhower era. Sort of like Elvis.

I can remember in 1964, at the start of the Beatle era, walking into a Supermarket. Like other retail outlets, they would have a rack of LPs and 45s for sale at reduced prices. I saw Elvis' "Heartbreak Hotel" and his "Elvis Presley, Shake Rattle and Roll" 45 EP going for 49 cents, with the picture covers! Four

years before the King's 1968 comeback, the music industry thought Elvis' career was through. Then a funny thing happened in 1969/1970, there was a big wave of nostalgia. The "Rock and Roll" revival was on, "Oldies" radio stations geared up with non-stop 50s and 60s songs. "Happy Days" became a huge hit on ABC TV in 1974. Elvis was back, just like in the 50s, touring the country again, as well as playing Vegas and knockin'em dead! Other 50s hit makers like Fats Domino, Bill Haley and the Comets, Jerry Lee Lewis, Little Richard, etc. were also performing again to huge audiences. Nostalgia for the cars, fashions, hair-do's, and 50s diners were all the rage.

In 1972 I walked into a thrift store and found an RCA Victor 7EY1JF, with the pink plastic case and the white tone arm. I immediately recognized it from many years earlier when I had seen one in our local record store. I picked it up, turned it on, and scratched the needle. There was sound but the reject was all messed up, so I passed on it. Years later, my friend John Lee (also from Ontario CA) introduced me to his collection of 45 players. In 1977. In 1978, for a wedding gift, John gave me a restored 45EY2, just like the one Pat Jones had given me 19 years earlier, except there was no pink nail polish on it! I've since collected several other 45 players including the 9EY3, 45EY3, 9JY, 7EY1JF, and Phil Vourtsis found me the one I always wanted, the Elvis Presley 7EP45.

My collection of six 45 players is small but they all work! They represent the last of the great American made record players made by the Radio Corporation of America. It transports us baby boomers back to that better era, the 1950s, when music was really music, Men were Men, Women were Women, and a Ford or Chevy actually lasted more than 10 years. Americans actually trusted the White House. And maybe someday I'll find that 45EY2 with the pink nail polish that Pat Jones gave me over 50 years ago lingering in some thrift store.



Vinyl or Polystyrene?

By Phil Vourtsis

The generic term used these days to describe phonograph record composition is vinyl. But guess what? If you examine the history of how records are made, you will find that polystyrene was also used, especially for 45s.

Back in the early days records were made of a shellac concoction which was compression molded and pressed into the ten inch and twelve inch 78 rpm records. When the switch was made to vinyl, the compression molding method was still used but now included the 45 rpm 7 inch records as well. RCA Victor had developed the 45 in the early 1940s as the replacement for the brittle, heavy, noisy 78 rpm records, but management fell asleep at the wheel when they did not put it into production until Columbia introduced the 33 rpm disk in 1948. This started the 'war of the speeds' but by 1950 both speeds had been accepted by all and all record companies started making both size disks, 33 and 45.

Now the quest was to find ways to trim the expense of manufacturing the disks and Columbia decided that injection molding of polystyrene (shorted to styrene) would be cheaper. While the investment in initial tooling was much higher for injection molding, the number of records that could be pressed per pound of styrene was much higher than that with vinyl. There were other benefits too. The injection molding required much less heat which meant the critical parts of the press would last much longer than those used in compression molding. Columbia found that injection molding of styrene worked dependably for the 7 inch 45 disk but was more involved with the larger disks. So Columbia and some other companies (Golden, Peter Pan, Varsity, United Artists, Mercury, Wing, Brunswick, King, to name a few.) made some of their 45 disks out of styrene.

So is there a downside to using styrene? Yes, indeed there is. Styrene is a stiffer and softer plastic than vinyl. So the records are less flexible and wear out quicker than vinyl. If your stylus is not aligned properly or is tracking too heavily, the styrene disk can be greatly damaged in just one play. Another annoyance with styrene is that the labels tend to fall off easily. Unlike vinyl disks which have the labels pressed

on during the molding process, the labels have to be glued on after the molding process with styrene disks.

RCA Victor experimented with injection molding and styrene but decided that the quality of the recording on the disk was not sufficient and they continued with compression molding with vinyl making great strides in increasing production and lowering costs. Most of the styrene 45s were made from the 1950s through the 1970s. As production of all records dropped in the early 80s with the introduction of the compact disk, the few companies left manufacturing 45s went exclusively to vinyl again. To tell them apart, you can gently bend the 45 and the less flexible ones are the styrene ones. Be careful when trying this because it is pretty easy to crack a styrene disk so don't try it on the disk that is worth big money. They say if you tap the edge of the disk with a ring, the vinyl disk will make a lower pitched noise than the styrene disk. I tried this but did not get consistent results.

In conclusion, if you have a 45 rpm record collection it is a pretty sure bet that you have some styrene disks. If you play them on older vintage machines, be careful with regard to the tracking weight of the tone arm and the condition of the stylus. For more information regarding this subject search for Billboard Magazine's Jan. 16, 1954 issue online.

Note: After researching and writing this article I closely examined my collection of newer 45s and found that RCA 45s from the 80s have labels that are falling off! Does this mean that RCA was using Styrene in the 80s? If anyone has more information on this please let me know.

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Send to Phil Vourtsis, 13 Cornell Place, Manalapan, NJ, 07726 or you can use Paypal (Account is pvourtsis@optonline.net, no credit cards please)
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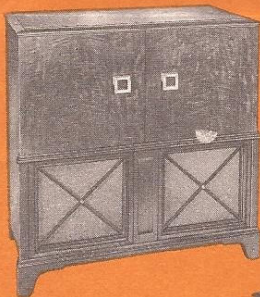
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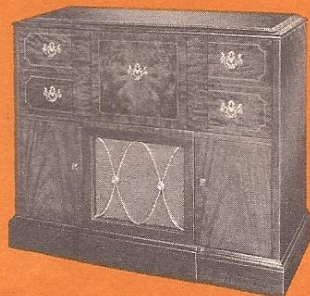
RCA Victor 9-W-101
Distinctive Period cabinet. Sensational "45" system. AM and RCA Victor FM radio. Storage space for more than 38 hours of record playing time. Choose walnut or mahogany finish. AC.

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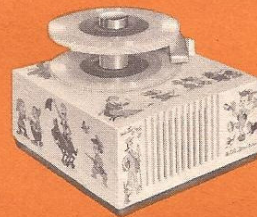


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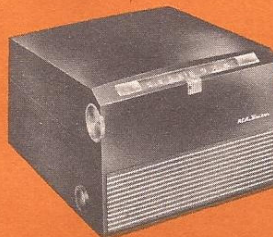
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Want List

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Services

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Woodcliff Lake, NJ 07677
rdbecker@aol.com

Beige knob for 8EY4FK
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7HF45 Oak or Maple preferred
8EY4DJ gray plastic front with lid
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Joe Centanni
(585.230.1539)
74 Oakbriar Ct
Penfield, NY 14526
s100x@rochester.rr.com
VM Stereo 45 player
Magnavox 45 player

Charles Cummins
(817-732-4313)
3912 Calmont Ave
Fort Worth, Texas 76107

David Cox
(937)484-3241
1407 Knight Road
Urbana, OH 43078
dcc49@yahoo.com
45 spindle for Admiral 5W12N 2-speed record player
Bakelite lid for Zenith twin seven
Outer concentric radio/phono knob for Emerson 635

Dennis D'Amico
11892 Pine Street
Los Alamitos, CA 90720-4163
lionelguy@yahoo.com

Bill Gourd
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In priority order:
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FOR SALE 15E Demonstrator

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161 Twelve Oaks Lane
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Rkolba0211@aol.com

John Lee
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nipper45@verizon.net
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ortl@aol.com
Early Disney models

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Zenith twin seven (G660) or
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Dan Saporito
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Doug Robinson
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Doug45rpm@hotmail.com

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Phil Vourtsis
(732-446-2427)
13 Cornell Place
Manalapan, NJ 07726
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Books signed by author
The Fabulous Victrola '45'
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