

GOTTA GROOVE RECORDS

THE ARTIST'S PREFERRED PRESSING PLANT

RECORD MANUFACTURING GUIDE



THE PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE IS TO ASSIST BOTH THOSE WHO HAVE ALREADY PLACED A MANUFACTURING ORDER, AS WELL AS THOSE WHO ARE NEW TO VINYL, AND CONTEMPLATING A VINYL RECORD PROJECT FOR THE FIRST TIME.

THE GLOSSARY BELOW, WHILE NOT EXHAUSTIVE, EXPLAINS SOME OF THE MOST COMMONLY USED AND INQUIRED-ABOUT TERMS IN VINYL MANUFACTURING.

THE FOLLOWING FEW PAGES DISCUSS THE VINYL LISTENING PROCESS.

FINALLY, THE LAST FEW PAGES EXPLORE SOME OF THE MANY OPTIONS AVAILABLE FROM GOTTA GROOVE RECORDS, AS WELL AS SOME ANCILLARY SERVICES OFFERED BY COMPANIES WITH WHOM WE WORK.

GLOSSARY OF COMMON VINYL TERMS:

2-STEP PLATING: THE ELECTROFORMING PROCESS WHICH YIELDS A SET OF MOTHERS AND A SET OF STAMPERS. AT GOTTA GROOVE, OTHER THAN 180 GRAM VINYL, THE DEFAULT PLATING OPTION IS 2-STEP (AND IS INCLUDED IN OUR RECORD PRICING). MOTHERS ARE ABLE TO MAKE ADDITIONAL STAMPERS, AS NEEDED.

3-STEP PLATING: THE ELECTROFORMING PROCESS WHICH YIELDS A SET OF FATHERS, MOTHERS, AND SET OF STAMPERS. AT GOTTA GROOVE, 180 GRAM VINYL PRESSINGS OF 500 OR MORE UNITS INCLUDE 3-STEP PLATING BY DEFAULT, AS WELL AS ORDERS OF LARGER QUANTITIES OF 7INCH OR 12INCH STANDARD WEIGHT RECORDS, FATHERS ARE ABLE TO MAKE ADDITIONAL MOTHERS. MOTHERS ARE ABLE TO MAKE ADDITIONAL STAMPERS.

BISCUIT: THE "SANDWICH" THAT IS ULTIMATELY PRESSED INTO A RECORD. A BISCUIT CONSISTS OF A HOCKEY-PUCK SHAPED PIECE OF EXTRUDED VINYL BETWEEN A LABEL ON THE TOP AND BOTTOM. THE BISCUIT IS COMPRESSED BY THE RECORD PRESS INTO THE SHAPE OF A VINYL RECORD. YOU CAN VIEW BISCUITS BEING PRESSED INTO RECORDS IN OUR COMPANY VIDEO AT THE FOLLOWING URL: WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/GOTTAGROOVERECORDS.

DOWNLOADS / DOWNLOAD CODES: MANY MODERN RECORDS INCLUDE A COUPON INSIDE THE RECORD JACKET WITH A UNIQUE CODE ENABLING THE CONSUMER TO REDEEM A DIGITAL VERSION OF THE PROGRAM MATERIAL EMBODIED ON THE RECORD, AND/OR OTHER BONUS MATERIAL. GOTTA GROOVE PROVIDES AN INCLUSIVE DOWNLOAD HOSTING SERVICE AS AN ADD-ON ITEM TO ORDERS.

ELECTROFORMING: THE FORMING (OR GROWING) OF A METAL ONTO THE FACE OF A SUBSTRATE. THIS PROCESS IS USED IN MANY INDUSTRIES WHERE VERY ACCURATE REPLICAS OF A SUBSTRATE ARE A REQUIREMENT. IN RECORD MANUFACTURING, THE SUBSTRATE IS THE CUT LACQUER. THE CUT LACQUER IS CLEANED AND THEN SPRAYED WITH A SILVER SOLUTION. THIS SPRAYED LACQUER IS THEN PUT INTO A BATH OF NICKEL SULFAMATE SOLUTION. WHEN AN ELECTRIC CURRENT IS RUN THROUGH THE BATH, NICKEL ATOMS ARE DRAWN TO THE FACE OF THE SILVERED LACQUER, AND A NICKEL LAYER "GROWS" ON THE FACE. WHEN THIS NICKEL LAYER IS REMOVED FROM THE LACQUER, THE REMOVED LAYER BECOMES THE FATHER OR STAMPER.

FATHERS: A FATHER IS THE INVERSE OF A CUT LACQUER - INSTEAD OF PLAYABLE GROOVES, THE FACE OF THE FATHER CONSISTS OF THE INVERSE OF GROOVES — PEAKS. A FATHER IS USED TO CREATE A MOTHER, AND IS THEN EITHER STORED FOR FUTURE USE (IN 3-STEP PLATING) OR, CONVERTED TO A STAMPER (IN 2-STEP PLATING). FATHERS ARE SOMETIMES CALLED THE METAL MASTER.

INNERSLEEVE: ALSO REFERRED TO AS A "DUST SLEEVE" OR "BAG", THIS THE THE PAPER SLEEVE INTO WHICH THE RECORD IS DIRECTLY INSERTED. GOTTA GROOVE RECORDS RECORD PRICING INCLUDES BLANK INNERSLEEVES BY DEFAULT. BUT, YOU CAN ALSO ORDER PRINTED ARTWORK AND/OR TEXT ON INNERSLEEVES. BLANK INNERSLEEVES MOST COMMONLY HAVE A DIECUT HOLE ON EACH SIDE SO THE RECORD LABEL CAN SHOW THROUGH. PRINTED INNERSLEEVES CAN BE PRODUCED WITH OUR WITHOUT DIECUT HOLES. PLAIN PAPER INNERSLEEVES CAN CAUSE SURFACE SCRATCHES TO THE FACE OF THE RECORD, WHICH OVER TIME CAN SOUND. CARDSTOCK INNERSLEEVES EXACERBATE THIS SURFACE SCRATCH PROPENSITY, AND THEREFORE ARE NOT RECOMMENDED BY GOTTA GROOVE.

INSERT: AT GOTTA GROOVE, WE REFER TO ANYTHING THAT IS BEING INSERTED INTO A RECORD JACKET OTHER THAN THE SLEEVED RECORD AND DOWNLOAD CODES AS AN INSERT. OUR STANDARD INSERTS ARE 11x11" (FOR 12" RECORDS) OR 7x7" (FOR 7" RECORDS). BUT, INSERTS CAN REALLY BE MANY DIFFERENT SIZES AND FORMATS - STICKERS INSERTED INTO JACKETS, POSTCARDS, CDS OR DVDS STUFFED INTO A JACKET, ETC. SOME FOLKS REFER TO INNERSLEEVES AS INSERTS, BUT WE PREFER TO USE THE TERM "INSERT" FOR ANYTHING THAT IS NOT AN INNERSLEEVE, BUT WHICH IS GOING INTO A RECORD JACKET.

JACKETS: ALSO COMMONLY REFERRED TO AS A "COVER" A JACKET IS THE OUTER "POCKET" INTO WHICH SLEEVED RECORDS ARE INSERTED - RECORDS FIRST GO INTO AN INNERSLEEVE, AND ARE THEN INSERTED INTO THE RECORD JACKET. JACKETS ARE MOST COMMONLY MADE OF CARDSTOCK, WITH THE PRINTING DONE DIRECTLY ONTO THE WHITE CARDSTOCK (THIS IS CALLED DIRECT TO BOARD PRINT- ALSO SEE "TIP-ON JACKETS" IN THIS GLOSSARY).

LABEL: THE PAPER CIRCLE IN THE MIDDLE OF A PRESSED RECORD. SOMETIMES REFERRED TO AS A "STICKER", A RECORD LABEL IS ACTUALLY NOT ADHERED TO THE FACE OF THE DISC AFTER PRESSING - IT IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE PRESSING PROCESS, AND SERVES TO COOL THE MIDDLE OF THE RECORD WHILE IT IS BEING PRESSED.

LACQUERS: A BLANK LACQUER IS AN ALUMINUM DISC THAT IS COATED WITH A NITROCELLULOSE LACQUER LAYER. THERE ARE CURRENTLY TWO MANUFACTURERS OF BLANK LACQUERS IN THE WORLD - APOLLO/TRANSCO AND MDC. A LACQUER IS ALSO THE FIRST STEP IN THE VINYL MANUFACTURING PROCESS - GROOVES ARE CUT INTO THE FACE OF THE BLANK LACQUER VIA A MACHINE CALLED A LATHE. WHILE A LACQUER CAN BE PLAYED ON A TURNTABLE, MASTER LACQUERS THAT ARE GOING TO BE USED FOR A REAL PRESSING JOB ARE NEVER PLAYED - THEY ARE SENT DIRECTLY TO AN ELECTROPLATING FACILITY TO BE USED AS THE SUBSTRATE IN THE ELECTROFORMING PROCESS THAT MAKES THE METAL PARTS WHICH ARE EVENTUALLY USED TO PRESS RECORDS. CUT LACQUERS ARE SOMETIMES CALLED THE MASTERS.

LATHE: A RECORD LATHE IS A MACHINE USED TO CUT THE GROOVES INTO THE FACE OF A BLANK LACQUER. THIS MACHINE IS NOT A RECORD PRESS - THIS IS A MACHINE DESIGNED TO MAKE SINGLE CUTS OF MASTER RECORDINGS INTO BLANK LACQUERS, NOT TO MASS PRODUCE PRESSED RECORDS.

MATRIX INSCRIPTION / MATRIX NUMBER: SOMETIMES ALSO REFERRED TO AS A "SCRIBE" OR "SCRIBE NUMBER". THE ALPHANUMERIC IDENTIFIER THAT IS ETCHED INTO THE LEAD-OUT (MATRIX) AREA OF THE RECORD. MOST FREQUENTLY, THIS NUMBER MATCHES THE "CATALOG NUMBER" OR "SELECTION NUMBER", BUT IT IS ACTUALLY ARBITRARY - IT JUST HAS TO BE SOMETHING THAT IS SOMEWHAT UNIQUE. THE MATRIX INSCRIPTION IS IMPORTANT TO BOTH THE PLATING DEPT AND THE PRESSING DEPT, BECAUSE IT IS THE ONLY WAY OF VISUALLY IDENTIFYING LACQUERS AND METAL PARTS.

MOTHERS: THE METAL PLATE THAT IS TWO STEPS REMOVED FROM A CUT LACQUER — A MOTHER HAS GROOVES ON ITS FACE, AND CAN BE PLAYED ON A TURNTABLE. A MOTHER IS USED TO MAKE STAMPERS.

POLYBAGS: NO-FLAP POLYBAGS ARE CLEAR PLASTIC "SLEEVES" WHICH A JACKETED RECORD IS INSERTED INTO. MOST RECORD STORES WILL POLYBAG THEIR USED RECORDS. NO-FLAP POLYBAGS ARE OPEN AT THE TOP. RESEALABLE POLYBAGS HAVE A FLAP AT THE TOP AND AN ADHESIVE STRIP WHICH ENABLES THE END PURCHASER TO OPEN AND RE-SEAL THE FLAP AT THE TOP OF THE POLYBAG.

POLYLINED INNERSLEEVE: AN INNERSLEEVE WITH A PLASTIC LINER ON THE INSIDE, DESIGNED TO BETTER PROTECT THE FACE OF THE RECORD FROM SURFACE SCRATCHES.

PREMASTER: IN THE DIGITAL AGE, MANY RECORDS ARE CUT FROM A DIGITAL SOURCE. IN MOST CASES, A HIGH RESOLUTION SOURCE IS EQ'D / MASTERED SPECIFICALLY FOR VINYL. THIS NEW FILE IS CALLED THE VINYL PREMASTER. GOTTA GROOVE STRONGLY URGES ALL CUSTOMERS TO HAVE A VINYL PREMASTER MADE BY A REPUTABLE PROFESSIONAL WHO REGULARLY WORKS WITH THE VINYL FORMAT BEFORE SUBMITTING AUDIO TO BE CUT.

PROGRAM / PROGRAM MATERIAL: THE UNDERLYING SUBJECT SOURCE AUDIO EMBODIED IN A RECORD.

RECORD PRESS: A HYDRAULIC PRESS THAT COMPRESSES THE VINYL BISCUIT BETWEEN TWO STAMPERS AND PRODUCES PRESSED RECORDS. PRESSED RECORDS ARE NOT MADE FROM BLANK DISCS.

REFERENCE LACQUERS: SIMILAR TO MASTER LACQUERS IN THAT THESE ARE ALUMINUM DISCS WITH A NITROCELLULOSE COATING, GROOVES ARE CUT WITH A LATHE INTO THE FACE OF THESE FOR LISTENING INSTEAD OF FOR ELECTROFORMING. REFERENCE LACQUERS ARE USED TO ENSURE THAT THE PROGRAM MATERIAL IS TRANSLATING TO THE PHONOGRAPH MEDIUM IN AN ACCEPTABLE MANNER. (ALSO SEE "TEST CUTS"). NEITHER TEST CUTS OR REFERENCE LACQUERS ARE A SUBSTITUTE FOR TEST PRESSINGS.

SHRINKWRAP: THE CLEAR PLASTIC WRAP THAT, WHEN ORDERED, SEALS THE RECORD.

STAMPERS: THE METAL PART THAT IS AFFIXED TO A RECORD PRESS, WHICH STAMPS GROOVES INTO MELTED VINYL BISCUITS. STAMPERS ARE THE INVERSE OF GROOVES — PEAKS INSTEAD OF GROOVES.

TEST CUTS: THIS IS A SERVICE OFFERED BY GOTTA GROOVE SIMILAR TO REFERENCE LACQUERS. HOWEVER, INSTEAD OF BEING A PHYSICAL LACQUER DISC EMBODYING THE ENTIRE PROGRAM MATERIAL SENT OUT FOR APPROVAL, INSTEAD ONLY SAMPLES OF THE PROGRAM ARE CUT INTO A LACQUER, AND THEN PLAYED BACK AND RECORDED INTO A WAV FILE TO BE EMAILED FOR APPROVAL. NEITHER TEST CUTS OR REFERENCE LACQUERS ARE A SUBSTITUTE FOR TEST PRESSINGS.

TEST PRESSINGS: THESE ARE ACTUAL PRESSED RECORDS, BUT TYPICALLY ARE THE FIRST TIME THAT RECORDS ARE BEING PRESSED FROM A SET OF STAMPERS. THEY ARE THE "FINAL APPROVAL" MECHANISM BEFORE PRODUCTIONS COPIES OF A PARTICULAR PROGRAM ARE PRODUCED. THIS GUIDE COVERS TEST PRESSING AND TEST PRESSING LISTENING IN DEPTH - WE RECOMMEND THAT YOU CHECK OUT THAT SECTION.

TIP-ON JACKETS: THIS TYPE OF RECORD JACKET IS COMMONLY VIEWED AS A DELUXE UPGRADE. IN THIS TYPE OF PRINTING, THE ACTUAL PRINT IS DONE ON A SEPARATE SHEET OF TEXT PAPER WHICH IS ULTIMATELY WRAPPED AND GLUED TO A THICK CORRUGATED CORE. GOTTA GROOVE TIP-ON JACKETS USE 30PT CORES, AND INCLUDE MATTE OR GLOSS LAMINATION.

UPC/BAR CODE: AS WITH MOST ANY CONSUMER PRODUCT, MANY RECORDS HAVE BAR CODES. YOU CAN ORDER THESE FROM GGR. IF YOU HAVE A BAR CODE ON YOUR RECORD AT ALL (SOME RECORDS DO NOT), IT DOES NEED TO BE UNIQUE TO THAT RECORD — NOT THE SAME AS YOUR CD RELEASE. ALSO, IF YOU WORK WITH A DISTRIBUTOR, MOST DISTRIBUTORS PREFER EACH COLOR/VARIANT OF THE SAME RELEASE TO HAVE ITS OWN UNIQUE BAR CODE.

RECORD LISTENING - A FOREWORD

BY CLINT HOLLEY - WELL MADE MUSIC / GOTTA GROOVE RECORDS CHIEF LACQUER ENGINEER

WHY MY RECORD DOES NOT SOUND EXACTLY LIKE MY MASTERS

IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS, IT HAS BECOME CLEAR THAT CONSUMERS LOVE VINYL RECORDS. THE ARTWORK, THE LYRICS AND PERSONAL INTERACTION ARE ALL REASONS THAT THIS ONCE "DEAD" FORMAT HAS CATAPULTED BACK INTO THE MAINSTREAM CONSCIOUSNESS. BUT WHEN ASKED, MOST PEOPLE WOULD RESPOND THAT THE BIGGEST REASON THEY LOVE VINYL IS THE SOUND. TERMS LIKE "WARM" AND "ANALOG" ARE USED BY MANY A FAN TO DESCRIBE THE UNIQUE AND MUSICAL SOUND OF VINYL RECORDS. THERE ARE A FEW VERY IMPORTANT REASONS THAT RECORDS SOUND THE WAY THAT THEY DO AND WHY THEY SOUND VASTLY DIFFERENT FROM PURE DIGITAL RECORDINGS.

THE FIRST AND POSSIBLY MOST IMPORTANT REASON THAT RECORDS SOUND DIFFERENT FROM MP3S AND CDS IS THAT IN THE DIGITAL REALM, THE ARTIST CAN CREATE JUST ABOUT ANY SOUND THAT THEY WANT AND IT WILL BE FAITHFULLY REPRODUCED IN THE DIGITAL WORLD - IDENTICALLY AS THE ARTIST CREATED IT. RECORDS, AND SPECIFICALLY THE MACHINES USED TO MAKE THE MASTER RECORDINGS (CUTTING LATHE) DO NOT HAVE THE LUXURY OF UNLIMITED DYNAMIC RANGE AND FREQUENCY RESPONSE. A CUTTING LATHE USED TO CREATE PROFESSIONAL MASTER RECORDINGS IS A PRECISE AND COMPLEX MACHINE THAT AT ONE TIME REPRESENTED THE PINNACLE OF HIGH FIDELITY RECORDING. THAT BEING SAID, THE DELICATE CUTTER HEAD (THE PRECISE TRANSDUCER THAT "CUTS" THE GROOVES) CAN ONLY HANDLE A CERTAIN LEVEL OF HIGH FREQUENCY INFORMATION BEFORE THE COILS LITERALLY MELT INSIDE THE HEAD DUE TO OVERHEATING. FOR THIS REASON, AND ALSO BECAUSE HIGH FREQUENCIES TEND TO DISTORT ON PLAYBACK BEFORE OTHER FREQUENCIES, A VINYL MASTERING ENGINEER WILL "ROUND" OFF SOME HIGH FREQUENCIES WITH SPECIAL TOOLS IF IT SEEMS THEY MIGHT BE TOO PRESENT OR COULD CAUSE A PROBLEM ON PLAYBACK.

SECONDLY, IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT A RECORD IS A PHYSICAL MEDIUM AND IS BOUND BY CERTAIN LAWS AND PRINCIPLES THAT DO NOT CONSTRAIN DIGITAL MEDIUM. FOR EXAMPLE, A DIGITAL FILE CAN REPRESENT UNUSUAL "SPACES" WITH WIDE STEREO IMAGES AND UNNATURAL PANNING CONFIGURATIONS - EVEN WHEN EMBODIED IN A PHYSICAL MEDIUM SUCH AS A CD OR DVD, A DIGITAL FILE IS PURELY DATA, AND THEREFORE IS REPRODUCED IN AUDIO PRECISELY AS THE DATA DICTATES -- REGARDLESS OF THE PLAYER USED (SETTING ASIDE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SPEAKERS / AMPLIFIERS / ETC).

VINYL RECORDS, ON THE OTHER HAND, NEED TO HAVE A PHYSICAL GROOVE; AND WITHIN THOSE GROOVE WALLS THE WAVEFORMS OF THE AUDIO ARE CUT BY THE MECHANICAL CUTTER HEAD. BECAUSE OF THIS PHYSICAL GROUNDING, IT BECOMES NECESSARY FOR THE INFORMATION TO BE CUT TO BE GENERALLY IN PHASE AND CENTERED AROUND THE BASS FREQUENCIES AND SOMETIMES THIS REQUIRES THE USE OF SPECIAL FILTERS THAT WILL "CENTER" THE BASS TO AVOID THE CUTTER HEAD LIFTING OFF OF THE SURFACE OF THE LACQUER WHICH WOULD CAUSE SKIPS. THESE FILTERS WILL SLIGHTLY CHANGE THE OVERALL SOUND OF THE AUDIO CUT TO DISC, BUT WILL ENSURE THAT THE DISC PLAYS WITHOUT SKIPPING.

LASTLY, IT IS IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER THAT EACH RECORD IS A PHYSICAL ARTIFACT PLAYED BY A STYLUS ATTACHED TO A PLAYBACK CARTRIDGE. PLAYBACK CARTRIDGES VARY IN TYPE AND QUALITY AND CAN SOUND VASTLY DIFFERENT FROM ONE ANOTHER. IT IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND AND INVESTIGATE DIFFERENT TYPES OF CARTRIDGES IN ORDER TO FIND ONE IN YOUR PRICE RANGE THAT PRESENTS THE PLAYBACK OF AUDIO IN A WAY THAT YOU PERSONALLY FIND FLATTERING. DURING MY PERSONAL RESEARCH, I FOUND THAT SOME CARTS CAN BOOST OR CUT CERTAIN PARTS OF THE AUDIO SPECTRUM BY +/- 6DB (THAT'S A LOT!), IT WOULD BE UNWISE TO COMPARE A DIGITAL SOURCE (WHICH WILL PLAY THE SAME NO MATTER WHAT THE PLAYBACK DEVICE) WITH A RECORD BECAUSE THE RECORD CAN SOUND INFINITELY DIFFERENT GIVEN THE PLAYBACK DEVICE.

WHEN LISTENING TO A TEST PRESSING OF YOUR MUSIC ON RECORD FOR THE FIRST TIME, I WOULD SUGGEST CLOSING YOUR EYES AND ASKING "DOES THIS SOUND LIKE A GREAT RECORD?" MORE THAN "HOW DOES THIS COMPARE TO THE DIGITAL MASTERS". IN THE END, A RECORD REVEALS GREAT MUSICALITY AND DEPTH BUT THEY WILL RARELY IF EVER SOUND EXACTLY LIKE THE DIGITAL MASTERS PROVIDED DUE TO THE REASONS LISTED ABOVE.

TEST PRESSING LISTENING GUIDE

THESE TWO PAGES SERVE AS A TOOL FOR YOU WHEN EVALUATING THE TEST PRESSINGS YOU JUST RECEIVED, OR AS A PRIMER ON TEST PRESSING LISTENING IN GENERAL. WHILE NOT EXHAUSTIVE, THEY TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE MAJORITY OF COMMON INQUIRIES WE HAVE RECEIVED FROM FOLKS EVALUATING THEIR TEST PRESSINGS. WHILE WE DO ENCOURAGE YOU TO TAKE NOTE OF THE ADVICE IN THIS GUIDE, WHICH IS BASED UPON THE MANY RECORDS THAT HAVE BEEN APPROVED BY OUR CUSTOMERS AND PRESSED AT GGR OVER THE YEARS; WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU, AND WE WELCOME YOU TO CONTACT US WITH ANY CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR TEST PRESSINGS.

YOU CAN REACH US AT (800) 295-0171 OR SUPPORT@GOTTAGROOVERECORDS.COM.

WE LIKE TO REFER TO OUR RECORDS AS “VINYL PERFECT” — WE ARE ALWAYS STRIVING FOR PERFECTION IN AN IMPERFECT MEDIUM, SHIPPING RECORDS THAT ARE THE BEST THAT THEY CAN SOUND/LOOK GIVEN EACH PROJECT’S UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS.

WHEN YOU RECEIVE YOUR TEST PRESSINGS FROM GOTTA GROOVE RECORDS, THEY HAVE ALREADY BEEN LISTENED TO BY ONE (OR MORE) OF OUR QUALITY CONTROL EXPERTS - SOMETIMES LISTENED TO MORE THAN ONCE. WE EMPLOY A 3-STEP QUALITY ASSURANCE APPROACH - RECORDS ARE VISUALLY INSPECTED AS THEY ARE BEING PRESSED BY THE PRESS OPERATORS; APPROXIMATELY EVERY 25TH PRODUCTION COPY IS LISTENED TO BY QUALITY ASSURANCE EMPLOYEES (AND ALL TEST PRESSINGS ARE LISTENED TO IN THEIR ENTIRETY BY THESE SAME EMPLOYEES PRIOR TO SHIPPING); AND FINAL VISUAL INSPECTION IS CONDUCTED BY OUR ASSEMBLY TEAM.

WHILE OUR APPROACH CAN LENGTHEN THE AMOUNT OF TIME BETWEEN WHEN YOU PLACE YOUR ORDER AND WHEN YOU RECEIVE TEST PRESSINGS, WE DO PREFER TO EVALUATE ALL TEST PRESSINGS FOR ISSUES, AND EXHAUST EVERY OPTION IN THE MANUFACTURING PROCESS TO PRODUCE THE BEST SOUNDING RECORDS POSSIBLE, BEFORE THE TEST PRESSINGS GET INTO YOUR HANDS. THIS QUALITY CONTROL METHODOLOGY HAS, OVER THE YEARS, YIELDED A 98% TEST PRESSING APPROVAL RATING, AND HAS KEPT ISSUES WITH FINAL PRODUCTION RECORDS WELL UNDER 1%.

ALL THIS BEING SAID, IT IS STILL VERY IMPORTANT FOR YOU TO TAKE TEST PRESSING LISTENING SERIOUSLY - IN THE MAJORITY OF JOBS, IT IS THE LAST MAJOR APPROVAL YOU WILL BE MAKING BEFORE YOUR PRODUCTION COPIES ARE MANUFACTURED.

WHAT ARE TEST PRESSINGS?

TECHNICALLY, TEST PRESSINGS REALLY ARE NOT MUCH DIFFERENT THAN ANY PRESSED RECORD. THEY ARE THE SAME MATERIAL (PVC); MADE ON THE SAME MACHINES AS PRODUCTION RECORDS; AND REQUIRE THE SAME TYPE OF SETUP AS ANY PRESSED RECORD. HOWEVER, THEY SERVE TWO EXTREMELY IMPORTANT FUNCTIONS IN THE RECORD MANUFACTURING PROCESS - 1. THEY ARE THE FIRST ENCOUNTER WE HAVE IN LITERALLY PRESSING YOUR RECORD ONTO THE VINYL MEDIUM; AND 2. THEY ARE THE LAST CHECKPOINT FOR YOU TO MAKE SURE YOUR PROGRAM MATERIAL ON THE VINYL MEDIUM IS ACCEPTABLE.

TEST PRESSINGS ARE THE FIRST TIME YOUR MUSIC IS EVER HEARD OR SEEN ON VINYL:

WITH REGARD TO THE FIRST FUNCTION -- WHEN WE SET UP YOUR TEST PRESSING -- IT IS THE FIRST TIME THAT YOUR GROOVES ARE BEING STAMPED INTO VINYL. UP TO THE POINT OF THE FIRST TEST PRESSING SETUP, THE MAJORITY OF FOCUS IN THE PROCESS HAS NOT NECESSARILY BEEN ON HOW THE PLASTIC IS GOING TO MOLD INTO THE SHAPE OF THE GROOVES.

EARLY IN THE PROCESS, A LACQUER ENGINEER MAKES ADJUSTMENTS DURING THE CUT TO PREVENT THE MOST COMMON PLAYBACK ISSUES (MOST NOTABLY, THINGS LIKE HIGH FREQUENCY DISTORTION; TRACKING CHALLENGES; LEVEL CONSIDERATIONS). IN MOST CASES, YOU HAVE ALREADY REVIEWED SOME SORT OF REFERENCE LACQUER CUT FOR PLAYBACK ISSUES. WHILE THESE ARE VERY IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS ON ANY RECORD, THEY HAVE NO CONNECTION TO THE ACTUAL PRESSING PROCESS.

IN THE NEXT STEP (ELECTROFORMING - THE LITERAL “GROWING” OF THE METAL PARTS WHICH WILL EVENTUALLY MOLD THE PLASTIC INTO THE SHAPE OF YOUR GROOVES), THE PLATING MANAGER AND/OR OPERATOR IS LOOKING FOR VISUAL BLEMISHES ON THE LACQUERS AND THE METALIZED PARTS. GOTTA GROOVE’S PLATING OPERATION, AS WELL AS MOST OTHER PLATING OPERATIONS, WILL INCLUDE A LEVEL OF QUALITY CONTROL BY LISTENING TO THE METAL MOTHERS FORMED FROM YOUR LACQUERS. DEPENDING UPON WHAT IS HEARD ON THE MOTHERS, VARYING REMEDIES MAY BE ENTAILED IN REDUCING IMPERFECTIONS BEFORE THE STAMPERS EVEN HIT THE PRESSING PLANT FLOOR.

BUT, THE PRESS OPERATOR HAS THE DISTINCT TASK OF OVERSEEING YOUR AUDIO BEING PRODUCED IN A CONSUMER-COMPATIBLE TANGIBLE MEDIUM FOR THE FIRST TIME EVER (OTHER THAN TAPES, IF YOU MASTERED FROM TAPE). INSIDE THE RECORD PRESSING MACHINE, THE STAMPING OF YOUR GROOVES INTO MOLTEN HOT PLASTIC THAT CAN BE PLAYED ON ANY TURNTABLE ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD IS HAPPENING FOR THE VERY FIRST TIME. SEXY, RIGHT?

TRUTH BE TOLD, MANY RECORDS ARE SETUP AND RUN WITHOUT MANY ISSUES AT ALL. WE LOVE THOSE RECORDS. BUT, REGARDLESS OF HOW WELL A RECORD MAY HAVE RUN AT THE PRESS, AT GOTTA GROOVE, WE DO STILL LISTEN THROUGH THE ENTIRE DURATION OF EACH SIDE TO MAKE SURE THE TESTS ARE UP TO OUR PASSABLE STANDARDS. WE TAKE INTERNAL NOTES ON EVERY TEST PRESSING SET WE RUN - IN THE EASY CASES, WE’LL MARK THEM “NO ISSUES” AND SHIP THEM OFF TO YOU. IN SOME OTHER CASES, WE MAY MAKE A FEW NOTES ABOUT VARIOUS “VINYL NOISES” - EITHER JUST TO MAKE SURE WE HAVE A RECORD OF WHERE THEY ARE EVEN THOUGH WE ARE PASSING A TEST PRESSING AND SHIPPING IT TO YOU; OR TO NOTE FOR PURPOSES OF RE-RUNNING YOUR TEST PRESSINGS WITH DIFFERENT METAL PARTS, ON A DIFFERENT MACHINE, OR WITH OTHER DIFFERENT VARIABLES BEFORE PASSING AND SHIPPING THEM.

ONCE YOUR TEST PRESSINGS HAVE BEEN PASSED INTERNALLY AT GGR, THEY ARE PACKED AND SHIPPED TO YOU FOR REVIEW. IN MOST CASES, WE WILL SHIP TESTS ON THE DAY AFTER THEY ARE RUN (TO ALLOW THE RECORDS TO COOL ENOUGH TO PREVENT WARPING).

OK, I GET IT, A LOT GOES INTO MAKING TEST PRESSINGS. SO, WHAT DO I DO WITH THE TEST PRESSINGS NOW THAT I HAVE THEM?

BEFORE WE GET DEEPER, PROBABLY THE MOST BASIC (YET VERY IMPORTANT) CONFIRMATION WHEN LISTENING TO YOUR TEST PRESSINGS IS MAKING SURE THAT ALL OF YOUR TRACKS ARE IN THE RIGHT ORDER AND ON THE RIGHT SIDES OF THE RECORD! WHEN THE RECORD WAS CUT FROM A DIGITAL SOURCE, IT IS ALSO IMPORTANT TO MAKE SURE THERE ARE NO DIGITAL GLITCHES, OR TRACKS THAT ARE CUT OFF DUE TO A DATA ISSUE.

WE RECOMMEND LISTENING TO AT LEAST ONE COPY ALL THE WAY THROUGH ON MORE THAN ONE PROPERLY CALIBRATED TURNTABLE. WHAT DOES “PROPERLY CALIBRATED TURNTABLE” MEAN? WELL, IT DOES NOT NEED TO BE AN “AUDIOPHILE” SETUP. BUT, IT REALLY SHOULD, AT A MINIMUM HAVE A METAL TONE ARM WITH AN ADJUSTABLE COUNTERWEIGHT MECHANISM; AND HAVE A STYLUS/CARTRIDGE THAT IS AT LEAST MID-LEVEL CONSUMER GRADE. WHILE FAR FROM ALL-ENCOMPASSING, YOU CAN TYPICALLY TELL IF A CARTRIDGE IS AT LEAST MID-LEVEL CONSUMER GRADE IF IT IS DETACHABLE FROM ITS HEADSHELL, AND IF THE STYLUS CAN BE REMOVED/REPLACED SEPARATELY FROM THE CARTRIDGE/HEADSHELL. HAVING AN ANTI-SKATE ADJUSTMENT MECHANISM IS A PLUS, PARTICULARLY BECAUSE IT PROTECTS YOUR STYLUS AND RECORDS FROM WEAR. FINALLY, HAVING A STROBE IS A NICE TOOL, BECAUSE YOU CAN CONFIRM YOUR RECORD IS PLAYING AT THE PROPER SPEED.

THE REASON WE RECOMMEND LISTENING ON MORE THAN ONE TURNTABLE (PARTICULARLY IF YOU ENCOUNTER SOME AUDIO ISSUE THE FIRST TIME YOU PLAY A TEST PRESSING), IS TO GAIN PERSPECTIVE ON HOW THE RECORD WILL SOUND ON MULTIPLE SYSTEMS. YOU CAN’T CONTROL WHAT YOUR END CONSUMERS WILL BE LISTENING ON, BUT YOU CAN AT LEAST GAIN SOME PERSPECTIVE ON HOW THE CARTRIDGE/STYLUS IN PARTICULAR CAN MAKE THE RECORD SOUND DIFFERENT (SOMETIMES, DRAMATICALLY DIFFERENT).

FINALLY, A TURNTABLE IS ONLY PROPERLY CALIBRATED WHEN IT IS PROPERLY SET UP! BE SURE THAT YOU ARE NOT TRACKING YOUR STYLUS TOO HEAVILY, OR WORSE YET, TOO LIGHTLY (TRACKING TOO LIGHTLY CAN DAMAGE YOUR RECORD AND STYLUS, AS WELL AS MAKE VINYL NOISES FAR MORE APPARENT THAN THEY REALLY ARE). MAKE SURE THAT YOUR STYLUS IS NOT TOO WORN BEFORE USING IT; AND IT DOES HELP TO CLEAN THE STYLUS AND/OR RECORD BEFORE PLAYBACK (WITH PROPER CLEANING TOOLS/CHEMICALS).

YOU CAN FIND A PLETHORA OF TURNTABLE SETUP GUIDES ON THE INTERNET - ANALOG PLANET AND TURNTABLE LAB HAVE SOME GOOD BEGINNER SETUP GUIDES. IF YOU ARE BEYOND THE BEGINNER STAGE (AND STILL WOULD LIKE TO HEAR ABOUT WHAT OTHERS ARE DOING WITH THEIR SETUPS), THEN WWW.STEVEHOFFMAN.TV MIGHT BE A GOOD PLACE TO POKE AROUND.

THIS GUIDE TRIES TO COVER THE WIDE VARIETY OF INQUIRIES WE GET. THE BOTTOM LINE IS, TAKE A LISTEN TO YOUR TEST PRESSINGS FROM A “VINYL PERSPECTIVE” - YOU PROBABLY ALREADY ENJOY LISTENING TO RECORDS IF YOU ARE HAVING ONE MADE. SO, TAKE A LISTEN TO YOUR TESTS AS YOU WOULD ANY OTHER VINYL RECORD. IF YOU ARE NEW TO VINYL - AGAIN, LISTEN TO THE TEST PRESSINGS FROM A “VINYL PERSPECTIVE”, AND REFRAIN FROM A/B COMPARING IT TO A DIGITAL VERSION OF THE SAME PROGRAM MATERIAL - THEY ARE NOT SUPPOSED TO SOUND ALIKE, BECAUSE THEY ARE DIFFERENT MEDIUMS.

WHY DO I GET MULTIPLE COPIES OF TEST PRESSINGS...IS EACH COPY DIFFERENT?

NO, OR AT LEAST, NOT IN THEORY. IF YOU HEAR AN AUDIO ISSUE ON A RECORD, YOU WANT TO COMPARE IT TO ANOTHER COPY OF THE SAME RECORD. VERY GENERALLY SPEAKING, IF IT SOUNDS IDENTICAL IN THE EXACT SAME SPOT ON EACH COPY, IT IS VERY LIKELY IN THE RECORD (AND NOT EASILY GOING AWAY). CONVERSELY, IF YOU HEAR IT ON ONE COPY, BUT NOT ON ANOTHER, VERY GENERALLY SPEAKING IT IS LIKELY SOMETHING “ON” THE RECORD VS “IN” IT, OR IT IS SOME OTHER MANUFACTURING ANOMALY THAT CAN HAPPEN IN RECORD PRESSING. THE THING TO BEAR IN MIND IS, VINYL IS NOT A PERFECT MEDIUM - FAR FROM IT, ACTUALLY. WHEN THE PVC PRESSED RECORD WAS INVENTED, THE OVERALL GOAL WAS TO INCREASE THE DURATION OF PROGRAM MATERIAL CAPACITY ON A SINGLE SIDE, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME VIA A MEDIUM THAT COULD BE MASS PRODUCED AT A RELATIVELY LOW COST.

IN EACH STAGE OF THE SUPPLY CHAIN OF VINYL, THERE ARE A MYRIAD OF POTENTIAL CONTAMINANTS WHICH CAN MAKE A MARK ON HOW A PARTICULAR RECORD TURNS OUT - AND THIS IS EXCLUDING THE HUMAN ELEMENT, WHICH IS CERTAINLY PART OF THE PROCESS IN A BIG WAY. HERE IS A DRAMATICALLY SIMPLIFIED, SOMEWHAT CHRONOLOGICALLY SEQUENCED, LIST OF THE SUPPLY CHAIN IN MAKING A RECORD:

LACQUER DISC MANUFACTURING > CUTTING STYLUS MANUFACTURING > LATHE OPERATION AND MASTER LACQUER CUTTING > LACQUER PACKAGING > COURIER SHIPPING TO ELECTROFORMING > LACQUER CLEANING > LACQUER SURFACE PREPARATION AND SILVERING > SILVERED LACQUER PLATING > FATHER/STAMPER SEPARATION FROM METAL MOTHER > REPLATING MOTHER TO MAKE STAMPER > STAMPER FORMING/PUNCHING/COINING > STAMPER SETUP ON PRESSING MACHINE > PVC VINYL PELLETT MANUFACTURE > PVC EXTRUSION > LABEL PRINT/PAPER/DRYING > PRESSING MACHINE AND MOLD CYCLE/TEMPERATURE OPERATION > EDGE TRIMMING OF PRESSED RECORD > SLEEVING OF RECORD > PACKING OF RECORD > SHIPPING OF RECORD

IN MANY WAYS, IT IS AMAZING THAT ANY RECORDS HAVE EVER MADE IT TO MARKET AT ALL! BUT, THE MEDIUM HAS SUSTAINED ITSELF FOR MANY DECADES IN SPITE OF ITS IMPERFECTIONS. FOR THIS REASON, IT IS IMPORTANT TO DISTINGUISH WHAT IS AN ACTUAL “DEFECT” IN A PRESSED RECORD, AND WHAT IS SOMETHING THAT SHOULD JUST BE EXPECTED FOR THE FORMAT.

SO, WHAT IS A DEFECT AND WHAT IS JUST VINYL BEING VINYL?

AS PREVIOUSLY MENTIONED, YOUR TEST PRESSING HAS BEEN LISTENED TO BEFORE WE APPROVE IT INTERNALLY TO SHIP TO YOU. BUT, THIS DOESN'T MEAN THAT WE CAN'T MISS SOMETHING, SO ALWAYS FEEL FREE TO CONTACT US TO DISCUSS.

HOWEVER, IT IS IMPORTANT TO REITERATE THAT VINYL IS NOT PERFECT, AND IT IS NOT REALISTIC TO EXPECT A RECORD TO SOUND AS "CLEAN" AS A DIGITAL FORMAT. TICKS (ALSO CALLED "POPS") ARE GOING TO BE PRESENT ON ALMOST EVERY VINYL SIDE TO SOME DEGREE. AT GOTTA GROOVE, WE DO OUR BEST TO MINIMIZE THOSE VARIABLES IN EACH STEP OF THE SUPPLY CHAIN THAT CONTRIBUTE TO TICKS. BUT, THERE STILL MAY BE SOME THAT WIND UP ON ANY GIVEN SIDE. OUR QUALITY CONTROL EMPLOYEES HAVE BEEN LISTENING TO THE RECORDS WE MANUFACTURE FOR MANY YEARS, AND HAVE DEVELOPED VERY CONSISTENT OBJECTIVE STANDARDS FOR WHAT "SHOULD" AND "SHOULD NOT" BE CONSIDERED PASSABLE.

TICKS WILL BE APPROACHED DIFFERENTLY ON DIFFERENT RECORDS. THE MOST PROMINENT CONSIDERATIONS ARE WHERE THE FALL IN RELATION TO THE PROGRAM MATERIAL; THE LEVEL OF THE TICK IN RELATION TO THE PROGRAM MATERIAL; THE LENGTH OF THE SIDE (AND OVERALL LEVEL OF THE SIDE); THE TYPE OF MUSIC; IF A RECORD IS A FIRST-PRESSING OR A RE-PRESSING; AND HOW MANY TEST PRESSING ATTEMPTS HAVE OCCURRED (SOMETIMES WE WILL RUN TESTS SEVERAL TIMES BEFORE SENDING THEM TO YOU FOR REVIEW). OTHER VINYL NOISES, SUCH AS NOISE FLOOR; LEAD-IN (OR LEAD-OUT) NOISES; SWOOSHES; MOLDING NOISES (SUCH AS NON-FILL OR STITCHING) ARE ALSO ALL EVALUATED IN WITH RESPECT TO THE CONTEXT OF THE GIVEN RECORD THEY FALL UPON.

YOU MAY BE COMPARING YOUR TEST PRESSINGS TO A REFERENCE CUT OF SOME SORT - WHETHER IT IS A FULL REFERENCE LACQUER/ACETATE, OR A DIGITAL TEST CUT SAMPLE YOU RECEIVED FROM US VIA EMAIL. THIS IS A GREAT IDEA! BUT, KEEP IN MIND THAT TEST CUTS ARE INTENDED TO CHECK MASTERING/CUTTING, NOT PLATING/PRESSING. YOU WILL ALMOST NEVER HEAR ANY SORT OF TICK OR "SURFACE NOISE" ON A REFERENCE CUT. EVEN THOUGH A REFERENCE CUT IS PLAYED ON A TURNTABLE, IT IS A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT MEDIUM AND MATERIAL THAN A PRESSED RECORD. THEREFORE, YOU MAY HEAR "VINYL NOISES" ON A TEST PRESSING THAT ARE NOT PRESENT ON A REFERENCE CUT; BUT THEY MAY NOT ACTUALLY BE A DEFECT WITH YOUR RECORD.

ONCE YOU RECEIVE YOUR TEST PRESSINGS, IN THE VAST MAJORITY OF CASES, WE HAVE SENT THEM TO YOU BECAUSE THEY HAVE EITHER PASSED OUR STRICT QUALITY CONTROL STANDARDS WITH FLYING COLORS, OR WE FEEL THAT THEY ARE THE BEST THAT YOUR PARTICULAR PRESSING IS GOING TO SOUND WITHIN REASONABLE MANUFACTURING AND TIMELINE STANDARDS.

WHAT DO I DO IF I FEEL THERE IS A DEFECT ON MY RECORD?

TELL US! IT'S VERY IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT NOTHING IN THIS TEST PRESSING GUIDE IS MEANT TO DISMISS YOUR CONCERN, SHOULD YOU HAVE ONE, WHEN LISTENING TO YOUR TEST PRESSINGS. CONVERSELY, THIS GUIDE IS TO ASSIST YOU IN DETERMINING WHAT, FROM AN OBJECTIVE STANDPOINT, IS AN ACTUAL "DEFECT", VS JUST VINYL BEING VINYL.

WHEN COMMUNICATING A POTENTIAL DEFECT TO US, IT IS HELPFUL TO BE AS SPECIFIC AS POSSIBLE IN BOTH THE DESCRIPTION, AND THE LOCATION ON THE FACE OF THE RECORD. WITH REGARD TO DESCRIPTION, TERMS LIKE "GLITCH", "SOMETHING", OR "MISTAKES" (UNLESS IT REALLY IS A MISTAKE, SUCH AS WRONG TRACK ORDER) DO NOT REALLY HELP MUCH. PLEASE TRY TO DESCRIBE IF YOU ARE HEARING A "POP", "STATIC", OR SOME OTHER MORE DESCRIPTIVE PHRASE. WITH REGARD TO LOCATION, IT'S BEST TO THINK OF THE FACE OF A RECORD LIKE A CLOCK - PUT THE MATRIX NUMBER/INSCRIPTION AT 6 O'CLOCK, AND THEN DESCRIBE TO US WHERE ON THE FACE OF THE CLOCK, IN WHICH TRACK YOU ARE HEARING AN ISSUE, AND APPROXIMATELY WHERE.

FOR EXAMPLE: "COULD YOU PLEASE CHECK OUT MY SIDE A FOR THREE REPEATING POPS IN TRACK 3, ABOUT ONE MINUTE AND 10 SECONDS INTO THE SIDE, AT APPROX. 3 O'CLOCK VINYL TIME?"

DIGITAL RECORDINGS OF THE TEST PRESSING AND/OR CELL PHONE VIDEO OF TEST PRESSING PLAYBACK CAN ALSO BE HELPFUL, AS LONG AS THEY ARE ACCOMPANIED BY AN UNDERSTANDABLE DESCRIPTION OF WHERE IN THE RECORD THEY ARE DERIVED.

MY TESTS ARE WARPED!

OUTSIDE OF VERY RARE "RUSH" CIRCUMSTANCES, WE TAKE GREAT EFFORT IN COOLING TEST PRESSINGS FOR A DAY BEFORE THEY ARE SHIPPED. THIS ENSURES THAT THEY ARE AS FLAT AS THEY POSSIBLY CAN BE WHEN THEY LEAVE OUR PLANT. HOWEVER, PARTICULARLY IN SUMMER MONTHS, WE DO HEAR ABOUT TEST PRESSINGS BEING WARPED ON A HANDFUL OF OCCASIONS. PLEASE REST ASSURED THAT THESE SITUATIONS ARE NOT CONNECTED TO MANUFACTURING, AND ARE NOT AN INDICATION THAT YOUR FINAL ORDER WILL BE WARPED.

THERE ARE VERY FEW CIRCUMSTANCES THAT CAN CAUSE WARPING TO OCCUR FROM THE MANUFACTURING PROCESS, AND WE DO QUALITY CONTROL PROCEDURES TO PREVENT SUCH ISSUES. HOWEVER, IF YOU ARE STILL CONCERNED ABOUT WARPING OF YOUR PRODUCTION COPIES BECAUSE YOUR TEST PRESSINGS ARE WARPED, HERE IS A WAY YOU CAN KNOW WHEN A RECORD IS WARPED DUE TO A MANUFACTURING ISSUE:

TAKE TWO RECORDS, WITH SIDE A FACING UP. PUT THE MATRIX NUMBER AT THE 6 O'CLOCK POSITION ON BOTH, AND PLACE ONE COPY ON TOP OF THE OTHER. IF THE WARPED PART OF THE RECORDS "HUG" ON ANOTHER, THEN THERE IS LIKELY SOME MANUFACTURING ISSUE THAT CAUSED THE WARP.

MY RECORD IS PLAYING TOO FAST/SLOW.

CUTTING A RECORD FAST OR SLOW IS MECHANICALLY IMPOSSIBLE. THE BEST THING YOU CAN DO IF YOU THINK YOUR TEST PRESSING IS NOT PLAYING AT THE RIGHT SPEED (ASSUMING THAT IT IS NOT CUT AT 33RPM WHEN IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE CUT AT 45RPM, OR VICE VERSA) IS TO PLAY THE RECORD ON A TURNTABLE THAT HAS A STROBE LIGHT, AND USE THE STROBE TO ENSURE THAT THE TURNTABLE IS SPINNING AT THE PROPER SPEED.

MY RECORD IS SKIPPING.

WE DO PERFORM A SKIP TEST ON EVERY RECORD WE PRESS, AND WILL NOT SEND OUT TEST PRESSINGS THAT FAIL THE TEST WITHOUT FIRST DISCUSSING WITH YOU. THAT BEING SAID, THERE ARE SOME THINGS IN PROGRAM MATERIAL THAT CAN MAKE A RECORD MORE SUSCEPTIBLE TO SKIPPING ON LOWER-END TURNTABLES, AND TURNTABLES WHICH ARE NOT PROPERLY CALIBRATED. THEREFORE, IF YOU ENCOUNTER A SKIP ON YOUR TEST PRESSING, IT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO TRY EVERY COPY OF THE TESTS YOU RECEIVED, AND DO SO ON MULTIPLE TURNTABLES. IF YOU ARE STILL ENCOUNTERING SKIPPING ISSUES, PLEASE CONTACT US RIGHT AWAY.

I HEAR "DISTORTION".

OK, THIS IS ADMITTEDLY COUNTERINTUITIVE - DISTORTION IS SOMETHING THAT COMES ALONG WITH VINYL. DISTORTION IS NOT REALLY "CUT" OR "PRESSED" INTO A GIVEN RECORD - IT IS SOMETHING THAT IS RELATED TO PLAYBACK, NOT MANUFACTURING. THEREFORE, WHEN IT IS AUDIBLE, IT WILL LIKELY VARY DEPENDING UPON THE TURNTABLE SETUP.

IN THE VAST MAJORITY OF CASES, YOU HAVE ALREADY LISTENED TO SOME SORT OF REFERENCE CUT BEFORE YOU RECEIVED YOUR TEST PRESSINGS - DISTORTION ISSUES ARE USUALLY CAUGHT IN THAT STAGE (BECAUSE REFERENCE CUTS ARE FOR CHECKING MASTERING/CUTTING, WHEREAS TEST PRESSINGS ARE FOR CHECKING PLATING/PRESSING). BUT, THERE IS STILL A COMMON TYPE OF DISTORTION THAT RENDERS ITSELF WHEN PLAYING SOME RECORDS ON SOME TURNTABLES - INNER GROOVE DISTORTION.

ONE OF THE INHERENT LIMITATIONS OF THE VINYL MEDIUM IS, AS THE STYLUS GETS CLOSER TO THE END OF A SIDE ON A TURNTABLE, THE APPARATUS HAS A HARDER TIME TRACKING ALL OF THE INFORMATION IN THE GROOVES. THE PART OF THE GROOVE THAT IS AFFECTED MOST CARRIES THE HIGH FREQUENCIES. THEREFORE, LONGER SIDES THAT END WITH REALLY LOUD/DENSE/HIGH FREQUENCY LADEN MATERIAL WILL BE THE MOST SUSCEPTIBLE TO "DISTORT" UPON PLAYBACK. THE EXACT SAME TRACK CUT AT THE VERY END OF A 22 MINUTE SIDE COULD SOUND DIFFERENT ON THE SAME TURNTABLE IF IT WERE CUT AS THE FIRST TRACK ON THAT SIDE.

SINCE DISTORTION IS MANIFESTED UPON PLAYBACK, THIS IS ANOTHER REASON THAT WE STRONGLY RECOMMEND YOU LISTEN TO YOUR RECORDS ON MULTIPLE PROPERLY CALIBRATED TURNTABLES. IN MANY CASES, THE DISTORTION YOU MAY HAVE HEARD ON ONE TURNTABLE WILL COMPLETELY ALLEVIATE ITSELF ON ANOTHER. OR CHANGING OUT A CARTRIDGE ON THE SAME TURNTABLE CAN CHANGE THE LISTENING EXPERIENCE. THE INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PLAYBACK APPARATUS IS ANOTHER THING TO LOVE ABOUT VINYL - ONE CAN CUSTOMIZE THEIR LISTENING EXPERIENCE TO THEIR OWN LIKING DEPENDING UPON THE SETUP OF THEIR TURNTABLE. BUT, THE VAST CUSTOMIZATION OPTIONS OF TURNTABLES (AND THE VAST NUMBER OF DIFFERENT TURNTABLES IN THE MARKETPLACE) IS ALSO PART OF THE EQUATION ON DECIDING WHETHER DISTORTION IS A "DEFECT" IN A GIVEN RECORD, OR JUST PART OF THE "VINYL VERSION" OF THE PROGRAM MATERIAL.

UNFORTUNATELY, IN MANY CASES, FINDING INNER GROOVE DISTORTION ON A TEST PRESSING IS A BIT TOO LATE IN THE PROCESS TO MAKE MATERIAL CHANGES ON A GIVEN RECORD - MAINLY DUE TO THE TIME AND EXPENSE INVOLVED IN MAKING A CHANGE TO THE RECORDING (ESSENTIALLY STARTING OVER FROM SCRATCH). BUT, IF IT IS SOMETHING THAT IS REALLY BOTHERING YOU, WE DO RECOMMEND DISCUSSING IT WITH US AND YOUR MASTERING ENGINEER BEFORE MAKING A FINAL DECISION.

WHY IS MY TEST PRESSING QUIETER THAN MY FAVORITE RECORDS IN MY COLLECTION?

THIS IS ALSO RELATED TO MASTERING. BUT, BASICALLY, THE LEVEL OF A GIVEN RECORD IS DICTATED BY THE UNIQUE ATTRIBUTES OF THE PROGRAM MATERIAL. JUST BECAUSE YOUR SOUND IS INFLUENCED BY NEIL YOUNG, AND YOUR SIDELength MATCHES THE RUNTIME OF SIDE B ON HARVEST, DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE AVERAGE LEVEL WILL BE IDENTICAL BETWEEN YOUR RECORD AND NEIL YOUNG'S. THERE ARE A LOT OF FACTORS THAT GO INTO ESTABLISHING THE LEVEL AT WHICH A RECORD IS CUT, AND CUTTING THE LOUDEST POSSIBLE SIDE IS RARELY THE OVERLYING GOAL OF THE CUTTING ENGINEER (UNLESS YOU HAVE HAD SOME SPECIFIC CONVERSATIONS BEFORE THE MASTERING PROCESS ABOUT THIS ASPECT). WE DO NOT RECOMMEND COMPARING RECORDS THAT ARE NOT YOUR OWN MUSIC TO YOUR OWN TEST PRESSINGS, BECAUSE IT HAS THE TENDENCY TO MUDDY UP HUMAN EAR/MIND PERCEPTIONS.

FOR SIMILAR REASONS (INCLUDING ASPECTS BEYOND LEVEL), WE DO NOT RECOMMEND CONCURRENTLY A/B COMPARING A DIGITAL SOURCE TO A TEST PRESSING, BECAUSE IT IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO MATCH LEVELS (THE DIGITAL WILL NEARLY ALWAYS BE "LOUDER"), AND ONCE THE SLIGHT DIFFERENCE IS HEARD, IT IS DIFFICULT FOR THE HUMAN EAR/MIND TO GET BEYOND IT.

THE BOTTOM LINE IS, TEST PRESSINGS ARE NOT GOING TO BE DIFFERENT IN LEVEL THAN YOUR FINAL PRESSING. LEVEL IS NOT TYPICALLY ONE OF THE MAJOR CONCERNS WHEN APPROVING A TEST PRESSING EITHER. BUT, IF IT IS SOMETHING THAT IS REALLY BOTHERING YOU, WE DO RECOMMEND DISCUSSING IT WITH US AND YOUR MASTERING ENGINEER BEFORE MAKING A FINAL DECISION.

VISUAL BLEMISHES.

WE GO TO GREAT LENGTH TO PREVENT ISSUES IN EACH STAGE OF THE MANUFACTURING SUPPLY CHAIN THAT HAVE POTENTIAL TO CAUSE VISUAL BLEMISHES. BUT, THERE ARE SOME VISUAL BLEMISHES THAT CAN STILL OCCUR WHEN CLEANING AND SPRAYING LIQUID SILVER ONTO A NITROCELLULOSE-COATED ALUMINUM DISC (AKA, A LACQUER); OR WHEN PRESSING A HOT BISCUIT OF PAPER AND PLASTIC BETWEEN TWO MOLDS AT OVER 100 TONS OF PRESSURE. IN MANY CASES, IF A VISUAL BLEMISH DOES NOT CAUSE A SOUND ISSUE, WE ARE PROBABLY GOING TO PASS IT. FEEL FREE TO CONTACT US IF YOU SEE SOMETHING THAT YOU DON'T THINK IS RIGHT ON YOUR TESTS.

ALSO, TAKE A QUICK LOOK AT THE MATRIX INSCRIPTION AND MAKE SURE THAT SIDE A HAS AN "A", AND SIDE B HAS A "B"!

I LISTENED, AND I LOVE. WHAT DO I DO NOW?

PROBABLY THE MOST IMPORTANT THING FOR YOUR PROJECT AT THIS POINT IS TO CONTACT US AND TELL US THAT YOUR TEST PRESSINGS ARE APPROVED! (THIS IMPORTANT STEP IS SOMETIMES FORGOTTEN - BE SURE TO TRY AND CONTACT US WITH APPROVAL AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AFTER YOU HAVE RECEIVED YOUR TEST PRESSINGS).



COLOR VINYL:

YOU CAN ADD A COLOR COMPONENT TO ALMOST ANY RECORD MANUFACTURING ORDER! PLEASE CHECK OUT OUR COLOR VINYL PAGE ON OUR WEBSITE FOR MORE INFORMATION, AND FOR PICTURES OF AVAILABLE COLORS. ADDING A COLOR COMPONENT IS A GREAT WAY TO HAVE A HANDFUL OF LIMITED EDITION COPIES FOR SUPERFANS, BAND MEMBERS, MANAGERS, AND OTHER VIP'S INVOLVED IN YOUR PROJECT.

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