



Vinyl Forever

Record Shopping in Tokyo

A branch of Disk Union in Shinjuku, Tokyo

The city of Tokyo is home to a large number of record stores catering to a growing number of new and second-hand vinyl enthusiasts from Japan and abroad.

SATO KUMIKO

THE global vinyl record revival shows no sign of abating and record stores all over Tokyo are gaining attention. Not only does Tokyo still have long-established record stores from the 1960s and earlier but especially in areas like Shimokitazawa and Kichijoji, hotspots for subcultures in theater, music and the like, new stores have also been opening up recently. The music lover can never get bored as each record store has its own distinctive charm. There are those specializing in particular genres, others where you can listen to vintage records through high-end audio equipment, and hybrid stores where you can relax in an adjoining café.

Fujimura Kazuki of Diskunion Company Limited, which operates the long-standing retailer of recorded music Disk Union, says of the vinyl revival, “I think the allure lies in the warm sound quality distinctive

All photos: Courtesy of Diskunion Company Limited

of records as well as the impressive sleeves. Ninety percent of the records in our stores are second-hand. There are enthusiasts with different tastes who enjoy expanding their collections in particular genres, such as 1960s British and American rock or jazz.”

The company sells vinyl records in 49 of its stores in the Kanto region (seven prefectures including Tokyo) and Osaka, and currently also has two stores specializing solely in records in the Shinjuku and Shibuya districts of Tokyo.

Japanese records are recognized all over the world for their high quality, this applying to everything from the audio mastering and pressing processes to the super-quiet virgin vinyl used in the records themselves. Such was the quality of records made in Japan that in the 1980s Japanese companies were often contracted to press audiophile versions of records for major labels overseas. These Japanese pressings of English-language music titles are often highly collectible.

Moreover, a culture of “taking good care of things” has taken root in Japan, which is why so many second-hand records can be found in excellent condition in terms both of sound quality and jacket appearance. Japanese record sleeves are peculiar in

Records pressed in Japan are famous for their high sound quality



that they are wrapped in *obi* paper belts carrying the track listing and other such information. Second-hand records with their obi still intact are highly prized by collectors.

It is a fact too that many Japanese record stores started buying from abroad at an early stage, which is another reason why the assortment of original records mainly from the UK and the USA is so abundant. If you go around record stores in Tokyo, you are sure to notice how nearly all music genres are covered, from classical, jazz and rock to movie soundtracks.

All of this has come to be known not just in Japan but also abroad, leading to the spread of a reputation among overseas record fans that “records are

best bought in Tokyo.” Fujimura says, “We’ve seen a global vinyl record boom especially in the last ten years, and there’s been an increase in foreign customers. I hear that there are many artists, movie directors and others who look forward to going around the record stores every time they visit Tokyo.”

Incidentally, it seems that Japanese music from the 1970s and 1980s, in particular city pop, is a popular genre among foreign visitors at the moment.

Nowadays, music is mainly distributed digitally, but there has also been a recent increase in the number of artists releasing their new music both digitally and as vinyl records. Being able to pick up such new packages is another part of the appeal of Tokyo record stores. 7



Second-hand records still wearing their *obi* information belts