

Thursday, March 23, 1989

The Future of Entertainment Technology

Compact disc sales soaring, stores cut vinyl album stock

By Chuck Squatriglia

CORRESPONDENT

Compact discs have become the latest trend in the music industry, and their rising popularity could cause the death of the vinyl album.

Several local record stores either have done away completely with their record inventories or are in the process of doing so.

Music Express already has eliminated its record inventory and carries only compact discs and cassette tapes. The only vinyl records the store carries are 12-inch singles, sales clerk Mark Ohtersen said.

Both Gere Comeaux, music manager of Hasting's Records, and Doug Donahue, manager of Record Bar, said their stores are eliminating albums completely.

"Right now we are working on expanding our CD inventory and deleting our albums," Comeaux said.

Donahue said, "We don't carry too many albums any more. We are working on phasing them out completely."

Music fans who don't own a CD player will find it harder to purchase music. However, some local music stores plan to continue carrying records as long as possible.

Comeaux said, "The extent to which records are phased out depends upon the store. Our older stores sell more albums than CDs and probably won't delete albums completely."

Tom Howard, manager of Tip Top Records, said, "As long as we can get albums we will continue to

handle them because there are a lot of turntables out there. I think it's stupid to do away with them."

Jeff Drake, manager of Camelot Records, said new releases will be the hardest to find.

"We're getting rid of albums as far as new titles are concerned," he said. "We are still going to carry budget albums, but it won't be an instance

"I think albums will be completely phased out. I just don't see record companies printing new stuff on vinyl. I'd say that in a couple of years, you'll see the end of albums; they'll quit manufacturing them altogether."

— Jeff Drake, Camelot Records

where we order weekly."

Budget albums are older releases that generally sell for a reduced price.

Some local record merchants say CDs eventually will eliminate vinyl albums, while others say albums always will be around and are only suffering low sales because of the sudden popularity of CDs.

"I think albums will be completely phased out," Drake said. "I just don't

see record companies printing new stuff on vinyl. I'd say that in a couple of years, you'll see the end of albums; they'll quit manufacturing them altogether."

Comeaux disagrees. "As long as there are record players around, there's going to be people wanting albums," she said.

David Gilbert, owner of Digital Audio Exchange, said albums always will be in demand.

"There always will be a group of people who will buy vinyl albums," he said.

Several record merchants said the record industry is responsible for the phase-out of albums.

Donahue said, "The record labels are at fault. They started this phase-out years ago. They aren't manufacturing many albums anymore."

Ohtersen agreed that the record companies are causing the elimination of the vinyl album.

"The record companies are slowing production of albums," he said. "They don't see any future in it."

Money plays a large part in the decision to eliminate record inventories, Howard said.

"A lot of the large chains of record stores want the big money items like CDs," he said. "They feel that if they can force the manufacturers to do away with albums, they can force everyone to go to CDs. That would give them a higher ticket item to sell, and they would make more money."

If record retailers would continue to carry albums and promote them, the manufacturers wouldn't eliminate album production, he said.

Donahue said the record compa-



Photo by Phelan M. Ebenhack

Compact discs are gaining momentum and popularity in home audio systems and begin-

ning to make vinyl records obsolete and unavailable in record stores.

nies themselves are causing the elimination of records by charging service charges to retailers for unsold albums.

"Record companies are charging a 25 percent service charge to retailers," he said. "If you order 100 albums and don't sell them, you end up having to pay 25 percent of the cost of the records when you return them."

This means retailers get a 75 percent refund when they return any unsold records, he said.

Retailers are less willing to purchase records because of the risk of losing money on unsold albums. This service charge is not levied on CDs, he said.

The record industry actually may reduce sales of recorded music by eliminating albums completely, Howard said. People without a CD player may refuse to change format and could quit buying recorded music altogether, he said.

"They'll end up handling the situation just as people did when they

stopped producing 8-track tapes," he said. "Instead of switching over to cassettes, many consumers quit buying music."

"You'll find a lot of the older people who have turntables aren't going to convert to CDs."

People who don't have CD players will have to convert or miss out on the future of music, Donahue said.

"People without CD players are going to have to get with the technology," he said.

Video cassette recorders gaining popularity among TV owners

New eight-millimeter cassette threatens conventional VHS, Beta format

By Thomas Boylan

ENTERTAINMENT WRITER

Watching a movie at home on a video cassette recorder (VCR) was once an activity for the few. Now it's part of everyday life, and there may well be more VCRs in the United States than households.

One former student owns two VCRs himself, and his two roommates each have one, for a total of four VCRs in one house. They have two that are Beta format and two of the more popular VHS format.

Dinosaurs

But how did the VCR explosion

this come about? Not too many years ago, few players could be found in households.

"The early VCRs were tremendous dinosaurs created for the television industry," said Chris Lewis a repair technician and Texas A&M graduate. "They were horribly expensive, used up miles of tape and were limited to black and white."

Consumer VCR sales didn't really begin until the Japanese entered the market, he said.

"In the early days, both Sony and JVC were developing similar consumer video machines, and they came into the marketplace in about

1974," Lewis said.

Sony and JVC had collaborated on the machines, and in developing a more useful recorder, Sony independently developed the Beta format. Beta is a Japanese word that means "a colorful paint stroke," Lewis said.

Meanwhile, JVC independently developed the VHS format, the one that is by far more popular among American consumers today.

Beta vs. VHS

"The Beta is still better," Lewis said. "It wraps more tape around the tape-head, and it uses a larger head for better picture quality. The JVC machine uses a smaller head with

commensurate poorer picture quality."

JVC's smaller head allows it to do special effects like slow-motion and freeze-framing. The viewer can look through a VHS format tape one frame at a time on a good machine, which is not possible on a Beta.

The tape-head is the device that reads the tape. It is a spinning drum that has two or four magnetic readers. The drum spins against the direction of the tape, thereby reading the tape faster than the tape moves.

Lewis explained why VHS machines became more popular. "Because of more successful marketing

and not enough picture quality difference, VHS became far more popular in the U.S.," he said.

Some South American countries have more Beta than VHS recorders, however, he said.

When the machines were new, the Beta format was limited to one hour of recording time, as opposed to two hours for VHS. Now, both formats have increased possible recording time dramatically.

Beta now supports up to six hours of recording time, and VHS tapes will record for up to eight hours.

"Improvements in technology have given audio advantages too," Lewis said. High-fidelity VCRs can record audio from 20 to 20,000 hertz, which means they sound about as good as a good home stereo system, he said. However, non-hi-fi systems record audio signals between 40 and 8,000 hertz, which is relatively muffled-sounding.

Lewis said he believes that both the Beta and VHS formats eventually will be outdated by another format that is already on the market.

"There's a new format that should eventually replace the 14-year-old formats, called eight-millimeter," he said. "It has a better picture quality and is very compact."

Camcorders — combination video camera recorder/players — already use the eight-millimeter technology.

Viewing preferences

Beta-format VCRs simply are not popular in the United States. Many video rental stores do not even carry Beta films.

Chris Nobosad, an employee of National Video Superstore in Bryan, said, "All we rent is VHS, and I only know of one store in town that rents Beta."

The most popular rented movies are dramas, Nobosad said. "Lots of housewives and people who don't work come in during the day and rent the dramas," he said. "Kids and their parents come in at night and get action and comedies."

Video is a booming business. In the year that Nobosad has worked at the rental store, National Video has increased its offerings from 7,500 tapes to 10,000. The store rents be-

tween 3,000 and 5,000 tapes each week.

The average renter takes two tapes, he said, although he said he has seen someone rent 13 at one time.

Almost every video store's busiest

"I always rent a movie when I'm with a girl — I make that a rule," Moore said. When he's with the guys, he said, he rents action films. He said he never rents just one movie at a time — usually taking two and once as many as four.

night is Saturday. Barbara Garton, who works at The Video Center in Bryan, said that more comedy and action movies were rented on Saturdays than dramas.

Why Rent

Saturday may be the busiest night for video stores, but many people are more likely to rent movies on weekdays.

Eddie Moore, a junior electrical engineering major, said he usually rents a tape during the week.

"It doesn't cost much, and it's easy, high-quality entertainment," he said. "I have a TV in my room, so I just plug in a tape and kick back."

He does not have too much time to watch movies, however, and given the choice, he said, he would rather socialize than watch a movie.

Moore said his choice of movies depends on who he is with. "I always rent a movie when I'm with a girl — I make that a rule," he said. When he's with the guys, he said, he rents action films. He said he never rents just one movie at a time — usually taking two and once as many as four.

Gary Ash, a freshman business major, said that the major reason he rents a movie is boredom, "when I just don't have anything else to do."



Photo by Phelan M. Ebenhack

Melissa Becktold, a senior health education major, looks through the selection of video cassettes available for rental at

video outlet National Video Superstore.