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Every issue it seems that all the products that we have reviewed get some sort of Recommendation, so I start to wonder whether we're doing our job properly. That's certainly my attitude when I'm feeling gloomy and pessimistic.

However, when I'm feeling optimistic, I start to realise that the reason everything is getting flags these days is simply that we've actually been doing our job properly for the last fifty or so years, so the weak and the second-rate may have already departed the scene.

There's also irony, less to do with youthful enthusiasm for smartphones and MP3 (as Dansette ruled the marketplace for many years), but in the lack of significant music these days. Although I do have some respect for the Ed Sheerans of this world, I also recognise that he and his contemporaries are no replacement for Bob Dylan. And since Dylan is now 77 years old, it's inevitable that he won't go on forever, despite the current 'Never Ending Tour'.

Would that I could find songwriters that match those that flourished in the '60s and '70s. And while I've singled out Dylan, he was just one of a number of important songwriters, situated on both sides of the Atlantic, that were active then but who are approaching retirement today.

And there's no avoiding the fact that songwriting was and is the key to creating significant pop and rock music. Include the blues legends from the '20s and '30s; the late Chuck Berry and Bo Diddley (who created the crucial rock'n'roll riffs); the original rock stars (such as Fats Domino, Elvis Presley, Buddy Holly, Jerry Lee Lewis, Eddie Cochran, Gene Vincent and The Everly Brothers); the British invasion (Beatles, Rolling Stones, Who, Kinks, Animals, Yardbirds, Small Faces, Moody Blues etc.); Tamla-Motown (Holland/Dozier/Holland, Smokey Robinson, Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye); the Stax and Atlantic soul legends (Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett, Sam & Dave etc.); females such as Joni Mitchell and Carly Simon; Bowie, Queen etc etc etcetera.....And I haven't even mentioned personal favourites like The Grateful Dead, Captain Beefheart and the Jefferson Airplane.....

That non-exhaustive list (which includes performers as well as songwriters) seems almost endless, but did eventually run out of steam. My question is where are the today's songwriters? I'm sure they do exist, but I must admit I'm struggling to find them... Any suggestions?

Record Cleaning

For years I've avoided cleaning records and record cleaners, partly through laziness and partly relying on the Linn philosophy that the stylus is the best cleaner around. That may be true of my own collection, which has always been played by a good quality stylus, but we're increasingly buying used vinyl, and my wife's collection (which happily includes original mono pressings of the first four Stones and first six Beatles albums) has no such guarantee.

Impressed by a dem at the Festival of Sound show and a subsequent home visit, I purchased a Kirmuss ultrasonic cleaning bath. My wife was away at the time, so I cleaned up her very first Rolling Stones album, which had accumulated detritus for some 54 years. Very proud of the results, I played it to my better half, who complained that although I'd cleaned it up beautifully, I'd also removed the nostalgia... Sometimes you just can't win!

Paul Messenger
Editor