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Marianne Colloms, Publisher

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SoundStage

There's no substitute for a real music collection, whether it's kept on discs or hard disks: Andrew Everard may be viewed as a Luddite by some of his more 'forward-thinking' acquaintances, but he's glad he's not reliant on a decent Internet connection for all his listening.

Y'see, I'd always thought of myself as being pretty much ahead of the curve, with just about all of my music collection consigned to a battery of network stores, ready for instant summoning-up and playing: whether it's some hard-hitting rock or a limpid solo piano performance, it's all just a swipe or two and a few taps away, whether on the main system, at my desk or even in the kitchen. Or indeed in all three locations, with just a bit more interaction with phone or tablet – ensuring I don't miss a word of a radio play or documentary when I need to make a cup of coffee or whatever.

However, what I see as pretty much state of the art appears to place me, in some eyes, only just one step on from extracting a wax cylinder out of its cardboard tube to enjoy an all-too-fleeting couple of minutes of music. Having casually mentioned the other evening to a fellow music-listener that I was particularly impressed with an album I'd just bought and downloaded, I was aware that a couple of words in what I'd just said were somehow failing to compute – namely 'bought' and 'downloaded'. Although of a similar age to me, and thus well able to remember when buying music meant a choice of LPs or cassettes, it seems my friend had bought the whole music streaming thing, hook, line and sinker.

As a result, he views actually buying music, one album at a time, as one might having to go down to the bicycle shop to have the accumulator for the family radio recharged, or waiting for the Cresta lorry to come and deliver your cream soda. Heaven knows what he'd make of those hipster music enthusiasts sipping an early morning soy-milk cappuccino in the chilly Record Store Day morning light...

Anyway, it seems I am resolutely old-tech, and actually owning recordings in any form, physical or digital, is so 20th Century as to be unthinkable in this enlightened age. You know, a bit like actually owning a car rather than renting something you could never afford for a low monthly payment, and then having nothing to show for it at the end of the rental period apart from a bill should you wish to keep the thing.

I can see the point of the streaming services, and make use of both Qobuz and Tidal to sample new recordings before deciding which to buy – or at least I do when Tidal's playing nicely with Roon, which for a while recently it wasn't until the nice people at Tidal Towers worked some behind the scenes magic.

And that brings me back to my 'no substitute for files' thesis: I'm writing this at the end of the weekend of the Unholy Trinity of Storms – Dudley, Eunice and Franklin – with Gladys said to be on the way, and no doubt Heracles and Improbability (or whatever they choose to call them) sometime soon. And while I didn't suffer anything more serious having to chase a wheelie-bin down the road, a series of power flickers repeatedly disrupted my Internet connection, followed by a gradual slowdown my ISP denied for most of a day, and then confirmed as a major fault. Suddenly I had maximum download speeds of a fractions of a Mbps, zero upload speed, and a fix date some days in the future. Why the delay? 'We're stretched to our limits – it's the storms, you know,' came the reply (well, they couldn't blame Covid, now we've seized back our freedom and all that).

Point is, were I to have been entirely reliant on streaming, I would have had nothing to listen to in order to while away the time I spent trying to work and deliver copy to various clients. Then having to write something, transfer it to my phone and then deliver it in text-sized chunks had me harking back to the old days of dial-up and acoustic couplers. Internet radio was out, as of course were the streaming services, Roon wasn't talking to its data servers, and – well, the rest would have been silence had I not been able to turn to my extensive network library, to play anything I wanted. And that, in a nutshell, is why I'm sticking to keeping my modern equivalent of the hand-cranked gramophone, however much of a crusty that makes me.

And don't even get me started on the politics of a favourite artist suddenly vanishing from your streaming service of choice...