

# Just for the record

*As audio technology surges on, one small Melbourne outfit is keeping both feet firmly planted in the past. And with good reason*

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**Just as video killed the radio star, the MP3 murdered the vinyl record.** Via cassette tapes and CD ROMs that is. Or did it? For as with desert boots and Fleetwood Mac, vinyl has been enjoying a huge comeback in recent years, which is music to the ears of the last remaining vinyl manufacturing facility in Australia.

Tucked away in an abandoned flourmill in Melbourne's Northern suburbs, Zenith Records is entirely committed to preserving the art of analogue music production. As Director Paul Rigby puts it: "We sometimes like to think of ourselves as custodians of the grail."

Launched near the start of the century, Zenith started out catering to hip-hop, punk, garage and heavy metal bands – niche genres that have always championed analogue recordings. Fast forward a decade or so and today it's producing records for pretty much every genre, with Paul Kelly's *The Merri Soul Sessions* hot off the press. But what's the appeal? Surely there's a reason the music industry supported the switch to digital recordings in the first place?

"Both have their attributes and limitations that are either loved or loathed by listeners," explains Paul. "Many love the supposed analogue 'warmth' of vinyl while complaining about the brittleness or glassiness of digital."

Paul also notes that the accessibility of digital downloads may have contributed to their devaluation, encouraging audiophiles to seek out something that little bit more special. Team this with the advent of the digital download card, which gives record buyers access to the digital version of the album purchased, and vinyl enthusiasts are now getting the best of both worlds.

But despite the increasing popularity of vinyl there's little chance it will ever oversaturate the marketplace or lose its sense of exclusivity. Like producers in the USA and Europe, Zenith uses presses from the early 1970s to cut its records, which are getting harder and harder to come by according to Paul. And maybe this helps to explain why we've all gone vinyl mad? Maybe vinyl is a little piece of the past we can still hold on to. Maybe it's the closest some of us will ever get to attending Woodstock, or seeing man walk on the moon for the first time... Whatever the reason, long live the LP. ●

**+**  
**ONLINE EXTRA**  
Learn more about Melbourne's vinyl maestros at [zenithrecords.org](http://zenithrecords.org)



## THE MUSIC MAKER

Firstly, master audio files are transferred to the grooves of a lacquer disc via a heated stylus – in one pass, in real time – in a process known as cutting. Once the master lacquers are cut, a layer of pure nickel is deposited using galvanic baths to create the stampers that will eventually be placed on the press to make the records. Because the lacquer surface is non-metallic and non-conductive, a fine opaque layer of silver must be deposited on the lacquer face which, with the help of a plating bath

and an electrical current, allows the nickel ions to attach and settle on the conductive lacquer.

Fast forward four hours and you have a nickel plate, which is the mirror image of the cut lacquer. While the lacquer is positive (i.e. playable), the nickel plate generated is a negative impression of the audio which, after polishing, trimming, centre-punching and forming, creates the 'stamper' now ready to be fitted to the record press.